

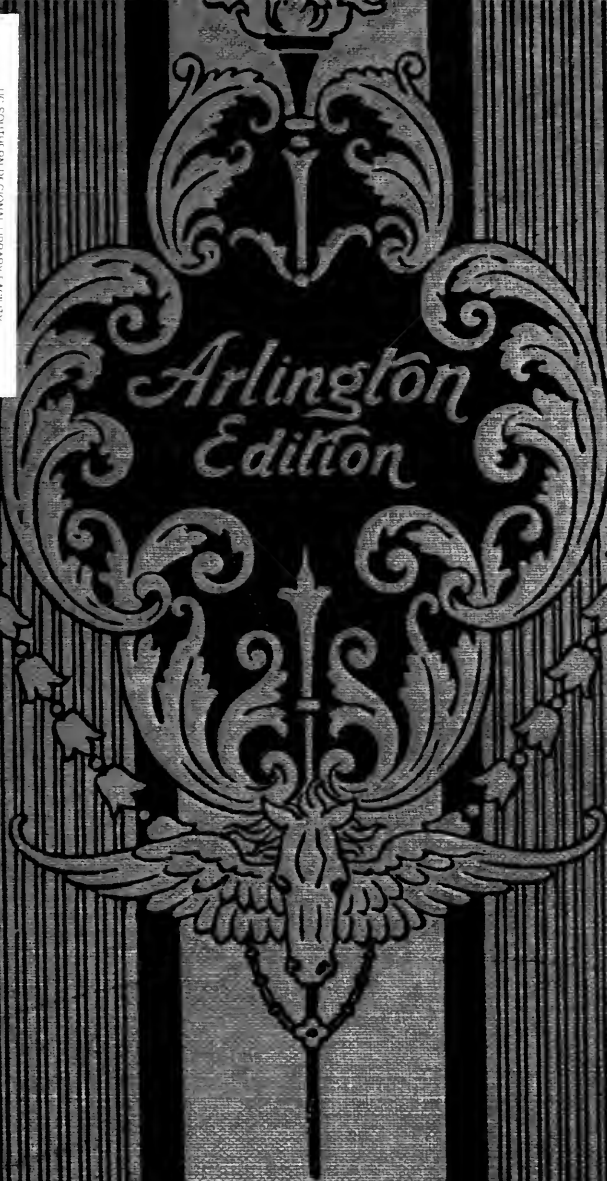
A

0001290931



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

*Arlington
Edition*



231A

Jean de Kerdren.

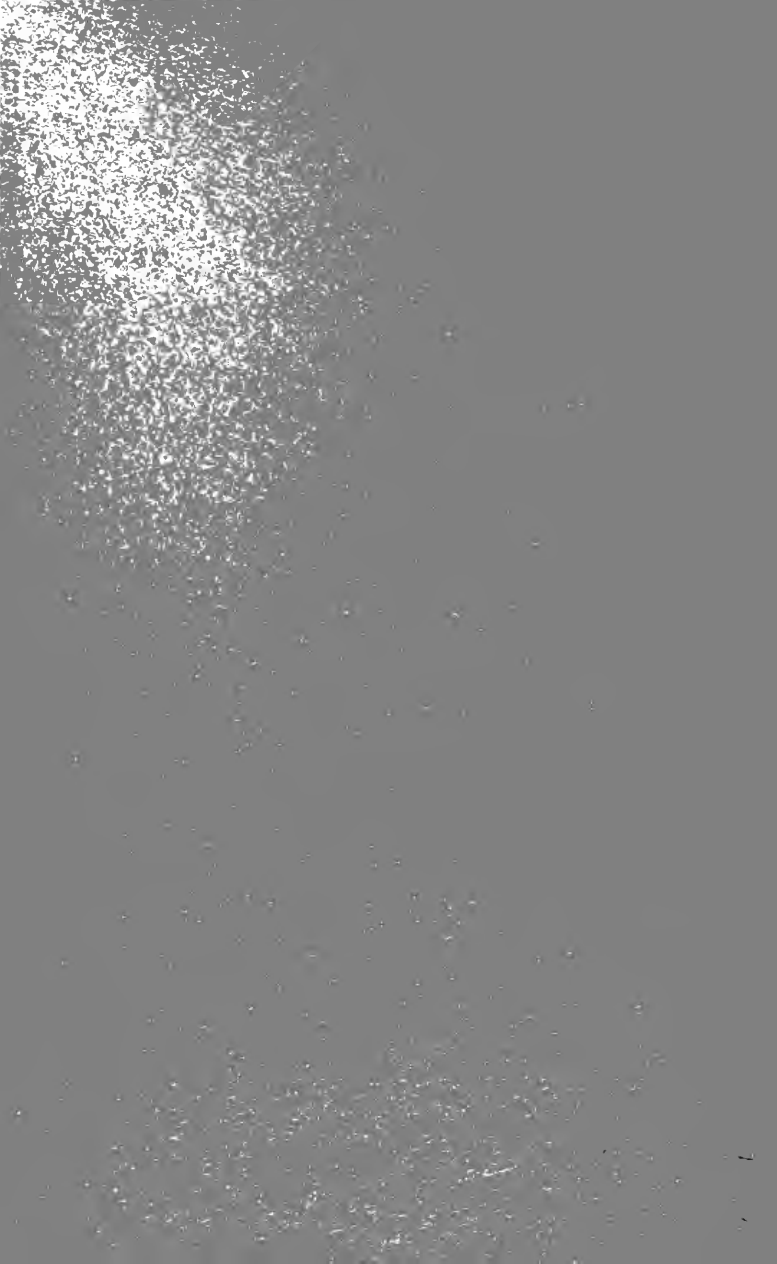
—BY—

JEANNE SCHULTZ,

AUTHOR OF "COLETTE."

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

NEW YORK:
HURST & CO.,
PUBLISHERS.



JEAN DE KERDREN.

CHAPTER I.

Rapidly, one by one, like well-appointed equipages, drawing up before the awning of a hotel, several small boats stopped at the foot of the companion-ladders; then with the light, quick step of men starting on a pleasure trip, the officers sprang down the ship's sides and seated themselves on the carpet-covered benches. A signal was given, the oars, which had been lifted in the air awaiting the word of command, fell in unison, and the barks sped swiftly away. Every ship in the whole squadron sent its contingent, so that the fleet seemed like a small town which some great event had stirred to its utmost.

The sea, of a transparent blue, was so calm that its motion would scarcely have sufficed to rock the cradle of a babe, and it was a pretty sight to see the boats, decked in their jauntiest, lit up by the morning sun. The sailors, dressed in their best, rose and fell with their oars in perfect time, showing their striped jerseys and collars of immaculate whiteness, while the officers, cigars in mouth, talked jocosely from one boat to another.

"The whole thing is a mechanical plaything," said one of them suddenly, looking round and taking in the dainty little fleet at a glance; "little automaton oarsmen, little officers stuck to their benches. I have just made you a present, brothers, of the 'game of regatta.'"

Laughter greeted this sally, and the conversation went on in the same style.

"By the way," interrupted another, "there is some one missing amongst us? Kerdren! Can it be possible that he, a madman amongst madmen, is not going to the carnival?"

"A madman! de Kerdren!"

"Why of course," returned the one who had spoken first. "You do not know him yet."

"Come! Come! d'Elbrue," the other continued, turning to his right-hand neighbor, "what have you done with Kerdren?"

"Nothing very bad, I can assure you," answered d'Elbrue calmly.

"Well, what is the matter then?"

"The matter! The whole matter is that he does not intend to come."

"Is he sick?"

"No."

"Has he had any bad news? Is he down in the mouth?"

"No."

"Can it be that he is in punishment?"

"No! You have not guessed right yet."

"But surely he has some good reason for missing a day like this?"

"He very certainly has."

"Is it indiscreet to ask what it is?"

"Not at all! I left him in the company of a guitar which he bought in Algiers, and a method which he had just received from Paris, a practical method for beginners, with exercises and airs arranged for the guitar by Emanuel Pin-cetto. He had already learned, not only how to hold his hands, but the scale of C, and he was just beginning, when I left, a slow waltz on four notes. If the ship were to blow up he would not move."

A universal burst of laughter greeted this explanation. Just then the boats touched the shore, and the landing was managed with the same mathematical precision as the start. The sailors turned the boats lengthways towards the land-

ing-stage, the officers sprang on shore, and the boats, lightened of their weight, started back again like sea-gulls glancing over the surface of the water.

It so happened that the fleet stationed in the Mediterranean found itself, by a happy accident, close to Nice during the Saturnalia which precedes Lent. In this city, as is well-known, the carnival has still the importance and the distinction it had in olden times, and visitors from all parts come there to spend the three days preceding Lent. The Vice-Admiral de Verviers, commander-in-chief of the squadron, was young enough in disposition to appreciate the unspoken desire of his whole crew, so he had arranged to make a short stay in the harbor of Nice, which the service did not absolutely require. It can thus easily be understood that the only officers and sailors who remained on board were those absolutely necessary to guard the ship, and some others, very few indeed, who stayed on board on account of some good reason or whimsical fancy. Amongst the latter was the officer with the guitar, he who was playing that slow waltz on four notes. Seated in his quarters, as his comrade had described him, his whole mind became so absorbed in his practising that the good-byes of the goers and comers were absolutely unheard by him.

Jean de Kerdren, Count of Penhoet, was the last descendant of a celebrated race of Brittany. Some chronicles affirmed that an ancestor of his was a companion of King Arthur, and had the honor of being seated at the round-table. Others less enthusiastic, or perhaps more sincere, stated that the family was unknown until towards the latter part of the reign of Charlemagne, at which time Jehan de Kerdren, John the Strong, as he was named in the chronicles of the time, naively compared himself, surrounded by his vast estates, to the great emperor in the centre of his dominions. Possibly it might even be said, that if there were any doubt in his mind, it was in favor of the de Kerdrens! And, really, it so happened that he had the advantage over his illustrious neighbor of being able to hold his smaller number of subjects in hand, as though they were but a single

man, and that no one dared even to think of conquering that wild land of his with its mysterious legends and strange Celtic tongue which was still spoken there.

Events proved that he was right on several other points, and the vast domains of Kerdren saw the dismemberment of Charlemagne's empire without the loss of as much as a stone, or the merest patch of ground. That did not make Jehan any prouder, for the very reason that he was already as proud as possible for mortal to be; and nothing, however marvelous, that happened to his family, could astonish him. To this trait of disposition of the first of the de Kerdrens another must be added, evinced by certain words which he repeated so habitually that the chronicles of the time transcribed them as though they were a kind of device. These words, perhaps somewhat stronger in the Breton tongue, meant, translated into French. "When a Kerdren holds, he never lets go."

This mixture of pride and tenacity descended from father to son, as a part of their inheritance; so much so that at the beginning of the Great Revolution the Kerdrens held with a tight grip all that had come to them from their fathers, and had besides preserved the habit of thinking themselves the highest born in the land. They had to weather hard times once or twice, it is true, and if they were able to treat Louis XI. as an equal, they were not able to do the same when the great Cardinal of Richelieu, Reign of Louis XIII., was in power,—he who had so little love for great nobles—and things were even worse during the following reign. Still, when everything was taken into account, their property was a magnificent one in 1789, and if they no longer exercised in the open day their rights of flotsam and jetsam of high-handed justice that they were wont to deal long ago, they were probably as potent as ever.

Unfortunately, hardihood and obstinacy stood no chance at the time when that terrible knell tolled for noble blood. It may be that the young army of the Republic was stronger than those of long ago, and tried to get more out of every one; certain it was, however, that great portions of the fam-

ily estates were torn from their rightful owners, and that if Jehan could have spoken from his grave, he would have had to acknowledge that great empires are not the only things which crumble into dust.

However, the family pride was saved; the word ruin was not even mentioned; and as the sole representatives of the family were then a young widow and a child, the de Kerdrens had still more than enough to fill such tiny mouths. Gradually, through legacies and rich marriages, the old grandeur came back; and at the time our story begins, if the de Kerdrens were no longer kings, they were considered in Brittany to be surrounded with such a halo of ancient birth and honor that it actually obscured the *eclat* of their enormous fortune; and certainly it is not a common thing in this prosaic nineteenth century to overlook the great fact of wealth for any reason whatever.

CHAPTER II.

From times immemorial all the Counts de Kerdren had been sailors. Pirates, of course, as long as it was possible for them to be such, serving in the navy when they were no longer able to make war on their own account, they fought with all that energy which characterized them, and the number of English which they had sent into kingdom come was simply impossible to calculate. They insisted, however, on it being well understood that if they made war on the enemy it was because it so pleased them, and not because they owed obedience to the King. Later on, when presented at court, they still preserved the stamp of their individuality, and offered their homage as a voluntary gift, never as a debt. It was well understood, however, that whenever a de Kerdren fought for a cause of which he approved, their chronicles had many a heroic and chivalrous deed to record; and if their names did not appear in the writings of the sad days of '93, it was because the father of the boy Count, who was then carelessly playing on his own wild heaths, had just been killed in the American War.

All the distinctive characteristics of his race, mingled with others that belonged to him individually, were found united in the young naval officer of whom we caught a glimpse on board one of the ships of the squadron. So far as his physique was concerned, it was bound to be respected even if it were not admired. Tall, broad-shouldered, splendidly made, his gait easy and agile, he at once gave out the idea of strength and decision. That was the first thing to be remarked about him; later on his distinction and gentlemanly manners became more and more appreciated. His face, though not exactly handsome, was a remarkable one. His

forehead, a genuine Breton forehead, broad and square,—on which tenacity was written in big letters,—showed at the same time an intelligence far beyond that possessed in common by all his countrymen, while his eyebrows, though rough and somewhat bushy, were beautifully shaped. His nose, rather long, and with wide-open nostrils that were always in motion, gave one an idea of perpetual activity of mind; of some one who was forever seeking for something, who was always on the watch.

The outline of his face, thanks to the regulation whiskers worn by him, was like that of most naval officers. His firm mouth showed the most beautiful teeth imaginable, and his smile, when he deigned to smile, changed entirely the expression of that haughty face. His eyes, which by themselves were enough to give beauty to an ugly countenance, seemed always on fire; with wide-opened lids, like eyes that were not afraid of being seen in the broad day, they reflected every moment such a variety of impressions that their very color seemed to change, and to graduate from absolute black to soft bluish tint, as the wild energy of that first glance grew milder and milder. They made one think of an eagle, of a lion, the sun; of everything that changes its moods rapidly; and one felt tempted to ask himself when one remarked the young man's complexion, so tanned with the sun that it seemed touched with gold, if he had not been burned by his own rays.

As for his disposition, it was a curious mixture of the distinctive characteristics of his race and much more modern feelings. Pride and hereditary tenacity were united in him to a remarkable degree, and the motto of the Kerdrens—"When a Kerdren holds, he never lets go," was just as applicable to him as to any one of his house, only his pride was somewhat different from that of his fathers, for he did not despise his surroundings, and was still prouder of being French than of being a Breton. That was a step to which none of his race had before attained.

Left an orphan after the war of 1870, from which his father did not return, he spent his early years in study—

always alone, so much so that when he was admitted to the Polytechnic School, at the age of eighteen, his peculiar disposition was already formed,—proud, thorough, brave and somewhat silent. Those two years of life in common with that joyous band of youths always ready for mischief, gave his mind that touch of gaiety, before wanting in his disposition; yet even that revealed itself in a way peculiar to himself alone. Now and then he opened the barred doors of his mind, and no one could be more lively, readier for any and every kind of mischief; then suddenly it was all over, and the aspect of that serious face made the follies of the preceding moment seem actually incredible.

And thus he was the most obliging of comrades, the staunchest of friends, with a strange mixture of contradictions in his character which gave him a reputation for extreme originality. Leaving the school when he was twenty, he at once went on shipboard changing his vessel whenever it was stationed in harbor. Next to his patriotism and his belief in the greatness of the de Kerdrens came his love for the sea. Since the time he was a little child, the ocean had been a fascinating mistress, his friend, his ideal. Those alone who have lived within sound of the waves can imagine the place the sea holds in the minds of those who dwell on its borders. It is everything to those men, not only because they derive their livelihood from it, but also because they love it. And it is amazing with what disdain they talk of the peasants living inland—"earth-worms" as they style them. They consider their own social standing vastly above the others', and do not scruple to say so. Even that rude sea-death which ever threatens them cannot break the tie. Sincerely mourning for the victims of yesterday, they re-embark with all the confidence in the world on the morrow. Their boat is so good, and the Madonna so powerful.

An impression felt so keenly by uneducated men must necessarily be much more powerful in the mind of such a man as Jean, and he had entertained for the sea, while he was still a child, a heartfelt adoration which had increased with his years. His heart seemed to beat in unison with

the great ocean in all its varied moods; he understood it in its fury, and he admired the way in which it lashed the rocks and high cliffs. By a strange contradiction, he loved it somewhat less when it calmed down; he was vexed that it wasted so much strength in suddenly becoming peaceful as a tiny lake, and bathed in such a caressing manner the self-same things it had fought with so savagely a short time before.

With all the ardor of his fifteen years he longed for an everlasting tempest. Still his anger cooled down quickly; and nestling in the hollow of some rock he felt the same lullaby in its songs that he had heard in its wild roars of fury. Sometimes he would whisper his secrets to it, and no one living could boast that Jean had ever spoken so intimately to them as to this ocean which was the bizarre and almost the only companion of his boyhood.

His fancy for wild weather had always remained with him, and even now when he saw the waves dash against the ship's sides, as they used long ago on the rocks of Kerdren—above all when by his calmness and skill he vanquished the magnificent sea in its anger—he felt himself trembling with joy. But nevertheless he pitied his mistress because she had allowed herself to be beaten; it seemed that she stood before him like a human being humiliated, and he longed as in former days to talk with her and console her.

His happiest hours were his night watches, when with stars and sea for his sole companions, he stood at the prow, gazing into the darkness. He was wont to compare himself in his childlike dreams to a genius of the sea, and to repeat with the pirates of old,—

“The tempest takes us where we want to go,
And the hurricane is the sail athwart our good ship's prow.”

Was it to be wondered at that, with such a disposition, he liked the deck of his own ship better than any other place in the world, and went into society as though by mere accident? Not that he was at all awkward in the drawing-room; his name gave him the right to go everywhere, while his easy, noble and courteous manners assured him a cordial

welcome. Still he cared but little to mingle with the gay throng.

And yet, often, when surrounded by his intimate friends, he became the gayest of the gay; he would have made remorse itself laugh—that saddest of all sad personages. He took everything on himself, organized with impetuous activity pleasure parties, comedies, the most absurd disguises; but as his holidays were always of the shortest, the order to embark would soon come, and then nothing kept him back; in the twinkling of an eye the sailor came to the front; he strapped his valise and started off at lightning speed. It seemed to him as though he would never get away on time, and if any one had wished to continue the private theatricals begun with Monsieur de Kerdren, they would have had to wait a good three years.

If during these fleeting opportunities some one had now and then fallen in love with Jean, he returned the fair one's preference so faintly that he started off without a second thought, and with the most perfect liberty of heart and mind.

He loudly avowed that he would never marry. Loving his profession as he loved it, he looked upon it—and with a certain show of justice—as absolutely incompatible with family life. “The very first thing necessary to make a good officer,” he used to say, “was absolute freedom from all ties; he should be able at the word of command to start from one end of the world to the other without a second thought; and that was impossible for a husband and a father. Perhaps the wife is ailing, the baby needs change of air; they have to be taken care of, to be petted, and a man longs to send to the infernal regions that command which obliges him to start for Cochin-China. A choice must be made, and I have made mine. Above all, I mean to remain a sailor, and like the Doge of Venice to wed the sea with my betrothal ring.”

On account of the way he was brought up, Jean, whether in his boyhood or manhood, had met but few women of his own world; so that he knew but little about them and thought them frailer and more delicate than they really were. They

seemed to him like dainty bric-a-brac that required infinite care, a great deal of cotton-batting and delicate handling either to preserve them or to take them from place to place, and the occupation of a man who does nothing but pack, did not seem to him a very enviable one. And yet in the history of his own family, there were souvenirs which spoke of heroines far above such weaknesses, but then they were of the blood of the Kerdrens, and that sufficed to explain everything.

He was as polite as Louis XIV. with all women; their sex alone demanded of him most chivalrous courtesy and even a protection which might lead to self-sacrifice. The habit dated itself far back in his family, and Jean did not think it at all necessary to give way to modern ideas on that point.

CHAPTER III.

Life was at its gayest in the streets of Nice, and that day of *confetti* promised to be one of the most brilliant ever known. Every one knows the amusement of this first day of the Carnival, and what a strange aspect the city assumes with the disguises that swarm everywhere. A kind of joyous free-masonry was established between the poor and the rich, and this not only amongst the foreigners who came from afar seeking amusement, but amongst the inhabitants themselves.

Every one was disguised in paper or silk, as well as his purse would allow; not only that, but every one joined in the merriment personally, screaming, laughing, bubbling all over with fun; that was the reason of the extraordinary animation, the effervescent liveliness which overcame every one present—why or how they scarcely knew. It was not a comedy with every gesture prepared beforehand; the crowd was composed of people who were amusing themselves with all their might and main, making every one present eager to emulate them.

To throw as many *confetti* as possible, and to receive the fewest number in return were the main objects of the day; and to one familiar with the use of those white sugar-plums made of plaster-of-Paris, powdery enough to fall to pieces when hurled and covering their victims with a fine flour-like dust, yet hard enough to strike with the force of hail-stones, this double ambition can be marvelously well understood. Flung from balconies against the coverings of the carriages, foot-passengers, and the whole crowd, the *confetti* descended like a cloud dense enough to be compared to the plague of the locusts of Egypt.

In two hours the ground was covered with them, the horses buried their hoofs in them; and the carriages seemed to have four revolving milky wheels covered with grayish flour.

And then there was a burning sun which changed all this blinding dust into dust of gold. A good humor and an observance of the proprieties prevailed, which rendered the intervention of the police unnecessary, while in the middle of this artificial fog, gay catch-words, odd meetings, fantastic visions, all the mystery of a masquerade, and the hope that every unknown would lead to some adventure were present. The feast was at its full.

At a street corner, three young men, or at least they might be supposed to be such, disguised as they were beneath the glistening skins of gigantic sea dolphins, were holding a council. Standing in front of them, on a platform which threatened to fall every moment, a tall domino looked over the crowd. Seated beside a barrel of *confetti*, with a shovel in his hand, he fenced without stopping, and the quickness of his movements, his retorts to the *lassi* who tried to climb up, made this seat which was his alone, the scene of a very pleasant comedy. Conjectures and indiscreet guesses were alike vain. The hood of the domino, falling over the face of the unknown like that of a Chartreuse monk, surrounded that head with a mysterious shadow, and the curious passers-by who were so liberally besprinkled made a *détour* to get out of the way, while the dolphins, now convinced, made a dashing charge. But the domino had eyed their movements with an equal attention, and taking hold of a big pail that was at his feet, he filled it to the brim, and threw its formidable contents over the trio as well as over the crowd, not once, but twice, ten times! Screams mingled with laughter rose like a tempest, and one of the young men so rudely welcomed sprang with a bound on the platform, and plunging his two hands into the barrel, called out to the domino:

"Let me help you with the battle, Kerdren?"

"Fight alone," the other replied, throwing back his hood

and pretending to fan himself. "I am worn out. For a whole hour I have been trying like a water-tap to empty this reservoir, but without effect. I want to mix with the crowd."

And as he sprang to the ground, he observed covetous eyes directed at his establishment.

"Here, boy," he said, catching by the waist a street urchin who was gazing eagerly, "shovel, barrel, complete,—everything is yours."

Then without waiting for the thanks which the poor little fellow did not seem to know how to express in everyday words, he passed his arms through one of the rounded fins offered him by his friends, and all four started off, walking rapidly.

"But what about that guitar," said one, when they had gone a few steps, "was that guitar a pretence to deceive us all?"

De Kerdren replied to this question in his usual phlegmatic way, by giving a description of his morning's work. The guitar had only three strings and when the last was broken and he had smoked the very last of his cigars, seized with a whimsical caprice, he had had himself rowed ashore. Having chosen his domino of a delicate lilac, in honor of the spring, he had paid for constructing the redoubtable scaffolding at the corner of a street, and stood there waiting until some of his comrades passed by; the moment he caught sight of them he asked no better fun than to accompany them wherever they were going.

Until night, black night came upon them, the crowd of young officers, which had grown like a snowball, amused themselves here and there and everywhere; and Jean had partaken so heartily of their pleasures as to be the first to jump into the row-boats next morning.

The first day of the carnival, everything is broad comedy, and no one need fear to carry any eccentricity, however broad, too far. The next day it is the turn of poetry; grace and elegance are the leaders of the fray. The fight still goes on, but the arms are surely the most courteous possible, the bomb-shells being daintiest bouquets. Flowers, flowers,

more flowers still, such is the order of the day. They are to be seen everywhere, in everybody's hands; and the whole city seems like an immense garden. Mimosa, Parma violets, roses, lilies of the valley—everything which at this season is carefully watched over in Parisian hot-houses, and hidden behind the florists' windows—here joyously bloom forth in freedom, ornament the balconies and perfume the air, as flowers that have gained their liberty alone can do. The profusion is such that one is tempted to believe that the ground is more fertile than it is in reality, and to imagine that all these festoons and garlands had bloomed there, spontaneously evoked by the first ray of the morning sun. The wealth with which the carriages were adorned could be seen nowhere else, and the procession of chariots laden with flowers which filed through the Promenade des Anglais was simply unrivalled. The more modest fiacre replaced its lanterns with big bouquets, garlanded its harness, or changed into perfumed rays the spokes of its wheels; and as for the private carriages each one was a poem. Everything that was solid was hidden, so that the looker-on saw with astonishment passing before his eyes a lilac bush, a bunch of roses, or a basket of hyacinths, with women in light costumes emerging from their surroundings; seated, standing, or perhaps like budding floweret just beginning to bloom an hour ago, one scarcely knew which.

It might be imagined that the happy times of fairies and sorcerers had returned, and that these graceful equipages needed nothing more than white unicorns, or a crowd of doves to draw them on this ground carpeted with bouquets which they could press under foot.

The chariot, which obtained the prize that self-same year, represented a large boat made of tea-roses and white violets which seemed to float on a sea of tiny ferns, and their maiden-hair sisters mingled with great reeds. The mast, the ropes which ran lightly from one end to the other, the helm, the anchor which fell upon a green ground with its rope of violets—everything was perfect; and the tri-color flag which floated in the air seemed pliable as silk.

Open-mouthed, so great was their admiration, the sailors of the squadron gazed on the chariot for the tenth time as it passed them by, and their pleasure became greater and greater. Though they criticised, as became their craft, certain details which did not seem to them quite orthodox, they all felt themselves honored by the fact that the boat had won the prize; the crowd was of the same opinion, for every time that the sailors met the pretty ship, cheers answered cheers, and gay retorts passed from one to the other like people who knew what politeness was. Amongst men, as amongst officers, the enthusiasm was the same, and never had inspiration been more happy than the one which had prompted the young officers that day to disguise themselves as common sailors. It was therefore somewhat of a surprise to the crowd when a footman attired in all the bravery of knee-breeches and silk stockings, who had been eagerly watching the young men for some time, walked straight towards them, and after a short parley, handed a letter to Jean. It was a dainty envelope with a tiny seal, which excited laughter and jokes, while the servant stood aside, hat in hand, like a man who knows his business is not yet finished. A duel, the offer of a second, the color of her hair and eyes, all was hinted at by his comrades when Jean turned towards them and read the letter just received.

"You must take it all in good part, fellows," he said, "but this is no intrigue—not even the shadow of one—though the letter is a woman's letter; and I think you will feel like sending me to perdition when you hear that I am the only one referred to.

"Now, don't make any excuses. A single victory is more than enough good luck for even a carnival day, and I wish—no, I wish nothing, if you will only remember that this year my villa is even more spacious than it generally is, and my dining-room big enough to contain all the lions of the day. That includes you, for if I am to judge by all the cheers that I hear from my window, you and all the comrades you wish to invite are of that category.

"My house steward has taken his precautions, and I can faithfully promise that you will not die of hunger. Let me add that I will have any number of pretty girls from the fair city of Nice, and my piano, old as it is, will last till midnight. I say midnight; for to-night it is something far more serious than the hour which chimed when Cinderella fled—it is the hour which ushers in King Lent.

"Ask your friends to forgive me for not sending invitations addressed to each and every one of them, and tell them that I have a weakness for all sailors, not forgetting yourself.

"FRANCOISE DE SEMIANE."

Needless to say, the sailors were on time, feeling that they too had a weakness for the Countess de Semiane; for the group which had surrounded Jean had accepted the invitation as one man, as the young officer said in his short note of thanks. The Countess de Semiane, left a widow a few years before, by one of the last courtiers of the court of Charles X., had been the intimate friend of Jean's grandmother. She had seen his mother grow up, child, young girl, young wife, and naturally thought a good deal of him.

But her estates in Auvergne were so far from Brittany that she scarcely knew the young man when he became an inmate of the Polytechnic School. He had been at her house a great deal after that; and she liked him in her own peculiar way, though she could not understand him. She scarcely knew what to make of his disposition, and she used to say that Jean seemed to her like a tightly-closed box, with the cover forever rising and falling, while the bystanders with beating hearts were wont to ask themselves which would come out of the receptacle, a dove or a wild beast? Nevertheless she had often purposed to find him some pretty heiress, thinking it was her duty as an experienced dowager to help him out in such a weighty matter, but he never listened to a matrimonial proposal, explaining that his title and his name would descend to a distant cousin. Knowing, therefore, that her interference was of no avail she thought no more about the matter, and confined herself to giving him a cordial invitation to her house whenever she could.

CHAPTER IV.

The guests had just left the dining-room, and coffee was being served in the great drawing-room. The site of the villa was charming, shaded with a number of tall palm-trees to which it owed its name. The drawing-room opened on a winter-garden, and farther on was an open veranda, and thence descended terrace by terrace to the garden. The influence of the day was felt there, as everywhere else, and wherever one stepped there were flowers, masses of flowers. Men standing by the windows talked in groups, and the Countess passed gracefully from one to the other.

"Really, it is something astonishing," she said, as if on the impulse of the moment, as she drew towards the officers, "wherever there are uniforms and lights it seems like a ball."

"We ought to be hired, then," said Jean, "it would be a capital means of putting life into drowsy *soirées*. But note, if you please, that my remarks do not apply to this evening."

"Needless to tell me such a thing as that. Look on the arrivals which luck has sent us. They are more brilliant than the brightest of light, more luminous than your epaulettes, if I dare say so."

And the Countess, who had moved away as she finished her remark, walked quickly towards the door, on the threshold of which stood a footman who loudly announced—"The Count and Mademoiselle de Valvieux."

Madame de Semiane had not exaggerated, and the newcomer was a thing as pretty to see as was possible to imagine. Slightly above the middle height, *svelte* and slender, she made one think of a young poplar tree from which the guardian prop had just been taken away, and which scarce

knew whether to stand erect or to droop. Her shoulders were narrow, but that gave her a kind of infantile grace which was the only fault it was possible to find about her. Every other detail was perfect; there was a charm about her still rarer than her beauty, of which she seemed completely unconscious. Her face, of a somewhat lengthened oval, was endowed with a most brilliant complexion, so transparently beautiful that it could only be compared to a Bengal rose, which changes gradually from deepest pink to most exquisite white.

Her silky ash-blonde hair, waved like that of a Greek statue, framed in her exquisite face. The original shade seemed to have been of purest gold, over which had fallen a cloud of silvery dust. Her mouth, with its somewhat thick lips, seemed like a ripe strawberry, and her teeth were so pretty and even that nature must have selected them one by one for her especially. The most striking parts of her face, however, were her velvet-brown eyes, of the hue of a deep-lined nasturtium, which came to a sudden oblique at one corner in a graceful whimsical way, totally unexpected. Her eyebrows had the same unexpected curve, giving a naive and somewhat astonished look to her face, and one felt inclined to thank her for it, as so much beauty is usually accompanied by infinite self-consciousness.

The costume which she wore suited her youth and gracefulness marvelously well; so much so that it seemed impossible to imagine that she could ever have been dressed differently. On some thin, light material, a quantity of moss rose-buds had been sewn, so thickly that the effect at a short distance was like that of one of those rich brocades of long ago. The front of her skirt and corsage were covered with sprays of lily of the valley, and the same flowers adorned her hair. Spring had been transformed into a woman, and difficult as it was, had retained her pristine grace, despite her submission to the caprices of fashion.

A discreet but expressive murmur welcomed the young girl's arrival, and, embarrassed by the staring eyes which surrounded her, as well as dazzled by the brilliancy of the

lights, she changed color and presented the Countess an immense bouquet of the same flowers which she herself wore, stammering like a school-girl repeating an ill-learned compliment, as she did so.

"They are charming," said Madame de Semiane, taking the bouquet and tightly holding the hand which offered it. "Have you gathered them yourself?" she asked smilingly.

Then giving the young girl time to regain her self-possession, she turned towards the Count de Valvieux and began a lively chat with him over the events of the day. It was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than that which existed between father and daughter; she, so tall and slender; he, of middle height, powerfully built, and of a ruddy complexion. He was one of those men of whom people naturally say:

"The way he will be carried off is a foregone conclusion; he will most certainly die of apoplexy."

A thorough man of the world, and most amiable, he had a peculiar manner of looking at his daughter that expressed the most unbounded admiration and a tenderness so full of pride that it was a delight to watch the expression of his eyes. In a moment or two, the little group collected near the conservatory towards which Madame de Semiane had led Mademoiselle de Valvieux, under pretext, as she said, of making her join the young people, and then, leaving her there, she herself went off to receive the new arrivals. The drawing-room filled up quickly, and as the Countess remarked the absence of her young friend, she turned around to look for him.

"I have caught you," she said to Jean, who was standing with his eyes fixed upon the door; "you are watching her. Come, confess your sin."

"I acknowledge that you guessed my thoughts correctly, Madame," he replied. "I am dying to know how that young lady, dressed as she is, is going to manage to sit down."

"You are absolutely uncivilized," returned the Countess indignantly, "and I despair of ever making anything of you."

Then going quickly up to Mademoiselle de Valvieux, she

gently pushed her into an arm-chair that stood within two feet of the young officer.

"There," she said, "sit down; you will be quite at home in this little corner." Turning again towards Jean, she whispered,—“What have you to say for yourself, now? Is she at all awkward?”

"Well!" he returned gravely, "she crushes them; the problem is solved: that is just what I thought she would do."

"Well? *maugrebleu!* as my poor Count used to say, what else could she do?"

"She might have left them on the rose-bush."

"So as to make up for those which you ruthlessly destroyed to-day, no doubt?"

"Certainly, Madame, I do not like to see sister-flowers engaged in strife with each other," answered Jean.

"Ah! that is very neat. Your last speech redeems the first."

"My last speech was only said to please you."

"He will not even acknowledge that she is pretty," she returned, slightly shrugging her shoulders. "Do you ever care to dance, to make up for your other bad qualities?"

"For a whole round of the clock, when I feel in such humor as I am in this evening."

"That is always the way you do things."

She left him with a sigh of relief to give her orders to the pianist, and a moment or two later she was absolutely surrounded by nearly all the young men in the room.

"Do please introduce me to Mademoiselle de Valvieux"—
"To the young lady dressed like a rose"—asked another.
"To that charming girl," said a third—every one described her as best they could, but they all had the same object in view—they wished to dance with her. The Countess looked round to where she had left Jean standing; he had gone away, and she saw him in the distance, bending low before a young married lady. She was thus obliged to introduce the whole crowd of partners to Alice de Valvieux, and to name them to her as rapidly as possible.

A habit of Jean's when he went into society was to pay

as much attention as possible to the young ladies who were comparatively speaking neglected; and he did it so good-naturedly and with so much grace that it was impossible to think it was done as a charity; and it can easily be understood that the fine-looking fellow, often the most distinguished man in the room, had thus evoked many a feeling of silent gratitude. His comrades often made fun of him by joking him about this chivalrous trait of his.

"I think there is nothing more detestable," he would answer, "than that kind of exhibition where the women pose for a lot of frivolous fools to peer at them through their monocles, eyeing them all over, just as a slave merchant in Constantinople would do. I do not care to be taken for a Turk, and consequently I try to act as if I were not one."

His example was followed by some of his friends; the young officers had thus gained for themselves a reputation of highest courtesy wherever they went together. Acting according to his custom, he did not venture this evening to pierce the circle which kept watch and guard round Alice, and he was taking his ease in a corner of the conservatory, looking like a man who felt sure he was doing right, when the Countess drew near him.

"Jean!" she said, "what has Mademoiselle de Valvieux done to you?"

"Nothing in the wide world, Madame; indeed, this evening is the first time I have ever had the honor of seeing her."

"Then what is the reason of this affectation of yours in not caring to dance with her?"

"I am afraid of crumpling her flowers," returned the young man, laughingly.

"And what besides?"

"And besides, I pledge you my word I did not even dream of affecting anything. But allow me to make a comparison. I know nothing more idiotic than that custom of the water to flow always towards the river; it would do much better to go and send its volume to some arid land where it

might be of some use. I have long been very indignant with the stupid element, and I do not care to imitate it."

"Yes! Yes! A regular Don Quixote. I'll tell all you say presently to Mademoiselle de Valvieux."

"Madame, I beg of you, do not give me such a ridiculous reputation."

"Why not, when you deserve it? Come, I must introduce you. When will you ask her to dance?"

"When her contingent of admirers desert her. After all, why do you want me to interfere with all these worthy fellows, and by my presence spoil their odd number which the gods so loved."

"But, if I ask you——"

"Ah! Then, Madame, I fly at once."

But just as Jean drew near the drawing-room, the clock struck midnight.

"The hour of Lent," he said, looking at her with a weak smile.

"What is written, is written," answered the Countess. "Do not imagine that I had any ulterior motive whatsoever. I simply wished to conquer that Breton head of yours, if it were possible to do so."

And taking Jean's arm, she returned to the drawing-room to receive the good-byes of her guests whom the stroke of midnight had dispersed as the sound of a gun scatters a covey of partridges. As he walked through the hall the young officer passed close to Alice, and seeing that she trembled a little with the change of atmosphere—

"Will you allow me, Mademoiselle," he said, with his usual courtesy, throwing on her shoulders a white Arabian bournouse which the Countess was in the habit of wearing when she went into the garden, and which was lying on an arm-chair. She bowed and thanked him in a few words, exhibiting a certain emotion which the young man could not well understand. Just then her father arrived, seeking his daughter with an anxious eye; but his face lit up when he saw she wore a wrap, and turning towards Jean, he said:

"Thanks for taking care of her; she is very susceptible to cold."

Every one of his movements showed so deep and anxious a tenderness that Jean felt touched, and hastening to fetch Alice's cloak lined with swansdown, he placed it on her shoulders quietly and respectfully. The pleiades having finished their greetings to Madame de Semiane hastily returned to their post, or at least to the carriage-door, whilst he, rejoining his comrades, took leave in his turn, and a moment or two afterwards was walking with them through the deserted streets, which were still covered with the debris of the fete. The conversation very naturally fell upon their evening, and needless to say Alice's name was repeated again and again. All Jean knew about her was the little which Madame de Semiane had told him.

The Count de Valvieux had been a widower for several years; he was enormously rich and had nothing to do, or rather his sole occupation was watching over his daughter, and this he did with such care and tenderness that since her birth he had found time for nothing else save to love her. Whether it was because she liked it, or that her health was somewhat delicate, he took her south every winter, now to one part of the coast, now to another. It so happened that they chanced that year to be neighbors of Madame Semiane, and the consequence was that a most agreeable intimacy sprang up between the two women. That was all he knew; but another of the young men present had frequently spoken of the de Valvieux at home, so that when all these points of information were put together, the story of the young girl's life was fairly well known.

Her mother had died of some lingering disease while Alice was very young, and since that time, Alice had been spoiled and flattered to death. Through as great a miracle as the one which saved the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, all the deference that was paid her did not turn her head, and the natural result was that, preserving her native simplicity, she saw the world through an enchanted prism, and she loved all humanity from the bottom of her heart.

"That is the reason why she does not seem to care for any one in particular; she would like to marry every one at once," remarked one of the young men with a laugh. "Perhaps so, in reality," he continued, "for certainly she has had lots of chances; and I remember having heard my sister say that if she had thought of pasting in an album the photographs of all her suitors, it would make a book that could vie with Hozier's Peerage, only in addition to the nobility of France, would be found the princes of finance, and many others, besides."

"She is waiting, perhaps, for some foreigner,"

"Or rather, until she meets some one who loves her for her own sake at least as much as for her millions."

"Poor thing," spoke Jean, "it would be but common charity to warn her that only one white blackbird has ever been known since the beginning of the world—the one de Musset speaks of somewhere—and the color of even that one was not unblemished."

"There is one thing that seems pretty certain, and that is that Kerdren does not intend to give her the chance of refusing him."

"No one will ever have the chance, and she, still less than any," replied Kerdren, with a seriousness far greater than the occasion seemed to warrant.

Just then the boats arrived at their destination, and the only thing that now remained was for each one to get himself to bed as quickly as possible. The carnival and the ship's holiday came to an end together; the next morning the squadron set sail at break of day.

CHAPTER V.

For a whole week the only topic of conversation in clubs and drawing-rooms was a dreadful crash which had come with the suddenness of a clap of thunder. Every morning the papers chronicled some fresh bankruptcy, too often followed by a suicide. The crash was not one of those panics that take place on the Bourse, which are felt only by people who are, to a certain extent, prepared for such accidents; it was far more complicated. Several families in the highest society, of a standing supposed to be above the necessity of speculation, were totally ruined. How it happened, it would be impossible to explain, and indeed the matter has never been cleared up to this day. One thing only was certain; a concern which had inspired the public with unheard-of confidence, on account of the prominent names amongst its directors had, thanks to this method, attracted a large amount of capital, and the result was not only a frightful financial loss, but still more serious in point of honor.

Thus individuals, whose names, till then perhaps, had never appeared in the public print, were now daily discussed, blamed and finally condemned because they had been part and parcel of a concern whose business methods were unquestionably dishonest, though their only fault was the over-confidence they had placed in others.

Wherever a squadron may be cruising, it is bound, sooner or later, to hear all news of any importance, and more particularly when it is within the seas of France. Bundles of newspapers arrive every few days, and if some of them were dated a week or so behind, to make up for it, the officers had the advantage of being able to trace the working details of any dramatic event from its beginning to its end.

The indignation with which the news of the catastrophe was received can well be imagined. Jean above all was thor-

roughly exasperated; and it was enough to make one tremble to hear the invectives which he directed against the company. He looked on the loss of the money with supreme indifference; but what affected him so grievously was the loss of honor, and that of several of the proudest houses amongst the French nobility. He ached to have in his power—were it for ever so short a time—some members of the bankrupt concern, and he could have meted out to them a retribution just, no doubt, but which would have savored strongly of the stern Medieval justice of the Kerdrens. Amongst the best-known names of the victims was one which the young officers who had taken part in the dance at Madame de Semiane's recognized with horrified surprise—that of the Count de Valvieux. His entire fortune had been engulfed in the catastrophe; and the shock was so sudden that it brought on an attack of apoplexy which carried him off six hours later. Then came an eulogium of the dead, and a strong condemnation against those who had wrought so much evil. How striking the contrast between the rich and idolized young girl of whom they caught a glimpse at Madame de Semiane's and the poverty-stricken Alice of to-day! Little wonder that her name was conned over and over during the day, and repeated with exclamations of sympathy.

Then followed a spell of bad weather; night and day the officers had to be on the alert, and soon all else was forgotten.

Jean ever found a fresh delight in renewing his solitary watches with the night, the wind and the sad music of the waves as his only companion. He mused over the troubles and misfortunes that assail those who battle with the world, and as he did so, he felt more and more rejoiced that the interests and pleasures of his life were far away from that dreadful struggle, and that on his good ship he could feel himself thousands of miles away from the mean intrigues of ordinary mortals.

A month or so after the great collapse, the squadron anchored in the waters of the port of Toulon, and Jean was thus able to attend to a certain business matter in that city.

Some short time before, an elderly cousin, whose name

Jean scarcely knew, and who had not communicated with any of his relations for more than thirty years, took the trouble to find out, just before making his will, that he was not the only living descendant of his ancient family. As a practical result of these investigations, he left Jean a very handsome fortune and a magnificent collection of antique jewels for which he had spent large sums, and to the acquisition of which he had devoted his life. The will had been left in the hands of a notary of Toulon, the money and the valuables in the custody of a banker of the same city who was bound to deliver the jewels into Jean's own hands; and even this was to be done in a somewhat peculiar way. The deceased, whether to display his skill as an amateur, or for some other reason, had ordained that the whole collection, after being placed on exhibition in the banker's drawing-room, should be delivered by him to Jean in the presence of as many witnesses as possible, after the custodian had read aloud to those assembled a short description of each separate article. This last condition was intended to give an idea of the comprehensiveness of the collection, mentioning the price paid for it, and also the latest valuation of the rare articles composing it. This clause had simply horrified Jean, who could see nothing in it, as he himself remarked, save a ridiculous desire for show. It was no doubt a vanity of the old baron's—a vanity so great that it survived death—or else why this multitude of witnesses, depriving his heirs of the power of receiving the jewels privately from the hands of his banker. Hating everything that brought him before the public so conspicuously, this idea of a kind of mass-meeting exasperated him—so much so that at first he thought of refusing both the fortune and the valuables.

But provision had been made even for this, and the will so provided that if Jean did not accept the estate, it reverted to a source eminently distasteful to the young officer. In case of his refusal, the collection and the fortune were alike willed to the Royal Museum in London, "In remembrance," so ran the instrument, "of the fifteen happy years spent in England, and of the cordial welcome which he had received there." Were it to have bestowed alms on the poor, endowed a hospital, or even a French museum, Jean would

not have cared; in such a case he would have been delighted to be rid of the fortune, rather than submit to so odious a clause; but to allow all that wealth to be diverted to foreign hands, was quite another thing. Patriot almost to the very verge of insanity, the strongest passion which the young man felt, next to his antipathy to his neighbors across the Rhine, was his hatred of all things English. This detestation, though it dated from the "Hundred Years' War," was as fresh as ever; and it must be acknowledged that since that remote period many things had occurred to strengthen it. So one can well imagine his smile of contempt at the very idea of despoiling himself to make one of foggy England's museums more beautiful and valuable, and how annoyed he was for a few days after reading the will, at the nonsensical freak of his distant cousin! However, the thing had to be decided one way or another; the squadron might sail at any moment; and whether the business was agreeable or not, it had to be got through with before its departure.

So at last one morning he determined to call on the banker in whose hands the fortune was deposited, to try to persuade him to make the ceremony as quiet as possible. He argued that no doubt Monsieur Champion cared as little as himself for having his drawing-room made the rendezvous of all the society people in Toulon; and that two men of common sense would easily be able to arrange the matter so that while fulfilling the behests of the eccentric testator—as great a lover of his treasures as Pygmalion was of Galatea—there might be some means found of making the ceremony as quiet as possible. The banker's house was in the most fashionable part of Toulon, and Jean, who was curiously susceptible to outside impressions, began to frown before he put his foot on the third step of the staircase.

Papering, carpets, the servant's livery, the very banisters covered with gilding; everything denoted the owner's bad taste, and the young officer began to ask himself anxiously what kind of a man he was going to deal with.

"The footman, liveried like a cathedral beadle, who is showing me the way," he said to himself, biting his moustache,

"seems to indicate a parvenu. I had better go away, perhaps." But the footman, majestic as though he were in reality called on to usher to their proper places the invited guests of a stylish wedding in high life, continued slowly to ascend the handsome gilded staircase, and Jean was obliged to follow. At last he was shown into a small drawing-room which looked so unutterably new that it seemed as if it had been freshly papered but an hour before. The majestic functionary departed, taking to his master the card which had just been given him, and leaving the visitor to survey his surroundings at his leisure. Never was examination more pitilessly made, and it seemed to Jean that he stood face to face with a dazzling display of kitchen utensils, each piece made of brass that shone like a miniature sun. He looked round and round, trying to make out the cause of this peculiar burnished-like effect; but just then the master of ceremonies re-appeared and conducted him to the banker's study, which was burnished in the same style, same taste, same overplus of everything. Monsieur Champlion was a plump little man, with a heightened color and an honest-looking face. Had he on a blue linen apron, and the traditional cap, he would have been the ideal type of a well-to-do grocer, but with his tight-fitting frock-coat and well-starched linen collar which stood up against the folds of his double chin, he was a banker devoid of distinction.

"Galvanoplastic," thought Jean, as the little man regained his arm-chair. "He has been plunged no doubt in a golden bath, and he imagines that he has changed his nature, now that his common clay has been covered with a layer of the precious metal. Poor old chap! However, what matters it, if I can only make him give way."

But nothing was further from the banker's views than to yield to Jean's wishes, and that for several reasons: Recently come to Toulon, he longed to penetrate the sacred recesses of Toulon society, and up to the present he had found no way of doing so. His birth, far below the middle class, naturally stood in his way, but besides he had had very few opportunities of coming in contact with the great world. Sooner or later, no doubt, the golden bath in which he had been plunged—to use the picturesque expression of the

young officer—would have gilded over the roughness and defects of his early training so perfectly that no one could refuse to open his doors to this brand new gentleman, fresh from his bath and changed from head to foot; but it would take a long time to accomplish this object, and Monsieur Champion was impatient to get into the swim at once. Like every man sprung from nothing and suddenly grown rich, his dream, his ambition, was to be admitted into that great world which to him he had gazed at so long from below that it seemed to him a place of wonderful grandeur, situated on almost inaccessible heights. He knew that if he could manage to climb a step or two upwards, the rest would be easy; so he sought only a rock, one lofty rock—a kind of lever as it were—from which he could bound on high.

It was his best-beloved project, his dream, the promised land, to enter which he would have crossed innumerable deserts; and he would willingly have given his right arm to whomsoever would have furnished him with a magic stilt to bear him aloft, when all at once, without his taking the least trouble—thanks to the originality of the Baron du Tre-lan—the open sesame so long desired had fallen right into his hand.

The collection which had been left in his care excited the utmost curiosity in the town; all the more so because no one had ever seen it. During his lifetime the Baron had kept his precious jewel under triple lock and key as a sultana is guarded in a harem; and no human eye could boast of having gazed on it. From the day the contents of the will were made known, one idea, one thought reigned supreme in the midst of those elegant worldings who have so much leisure on their hands that they are always ready to welcome something new, and that was to secure a good place for the opening of the collection. It was the great event which had been talked about for more than two weeks.

Day after day letters came to Monsieur Champion asking for the privilege of admission, the demand being made with the coolness of people who are always sure of their welcome; and the banker was equally proud and delighted at the thought of being brought into contact with the highest beau-monde. The ladies, above all, were to the fore, and never

had such a mass of dainty feminine correspondence flitted before the banker's eyes. The lions were as rare as they were costly; the young Count de Kerdren was known to be young, handsome, disdainful; so that there were two treats in store at the same time. It can easily be imagined from the foregoing that Monsieur Champlion was not at all likely to forego such a glorious triumphal arch of which he dreamt day and night merely to please Jean de Kerdren. His eyes flashed, and he spoke enthusiastically of his plighted word, and of his honor as a banker. When, however, the young officer ceased to make any further opposition, having divined the gentleman's motives pretty clearly, and simply asked the day and the hour of the rendezvous, the financier calmed down immediately.

"He did not wish to have any misunderstanding between them," he said; "whatever day and hour the young Count would be pleased to appoint would be more than satisfactory to him; and he would be distressed at the very idea of putting him to any extra trouble."

The banker allowed his joy to be displayed so naïvely that notwithstanding his discontent Jean could not help being amused. As a last favor, he asked if he might be allowed to take Madame Champlion's advice on the subject, and to introduce her to Jean at the same time. No reasonable objection could be found, and the young officer followed his host into an adjoining drawing-room in which a middle-aged woman who seemed the feminine replica of her husband was seated before a wool-work frame with her needle stuck in a group of enormous dahlias..

She rose so quickly that all her woollens fell to the carpet, so that Jean could only reply to her phrase of welcome by kneeling down to pick up the fallen skeins; then the lady, without stoppage, called out to some one at the further end of the appartement:

"Mademoiselle, go for Angele, she will be so delighted to meet the heir to Monsieur Trehan's collection."

The young man turned round to bow to the young lady, whom he had not before remarked, inwardly enraged at being treated as a sort of exhibition, when to his great surprise, he recognized Mademoiselle de Valvieux.

CHAPTER VI.

It was she, as pretty and as slender as ever, only thinner; and so pale that her face above her crape dress seemed like a fair white camellia laid on some jet ornament. Two bluish circles beneath her eyes could be seen even when her long eye-lashes drooped, like those misty fogs which appear in the depths of the horizon behind a leafy curtain. Jean took in all this with a single glance, thinking he had never before beheld a black gown at once so sombre and so sad.

As first he hesitated, as he recognized the young girl; then he quickly re-assumed his accustomed ease of manner, advanced a little towards her, and bent before her, murmuring a few words of condolence. Mademoiselle de Valvieux, who had not heard his approach, raised her head abruptly, and before he had time to finish his sentence, burst suddenly, as might a child, into tears which flowed down her cheeks so quickly, so abundantly, giving the young face an expression of such profound misery, that Jean suddenly stopped speaking, not knowing how to express his regret and his sympathy. She nervously tried to stop her tears with the back of her hands—to push them back, as it were—but the barrier was too feeble; her tears, heavy and shining like big summer rain-drops, trickled along her fingers without her even perceiving them.

The young officer drew a step nearer, and with an intonation full of pity and a look of genuine kindness in his expressive eyes—

“Ah! pardon me,” he said, “if I have hurt you; I should have alluded more gently to so recent a bereavement.”

“It is I who have to ask forgiveness,” she replied in a very low tone, moving as though she were about to offer her hand. “On the contrary, you have done me a great deal of good.” Then still lowering her voice, she continued;

"You are the first who have spoken to me of my father since I have been here."

Just then a door opened as though blown in by the wind, and a little girl whom Jean rightly supposed to be the Angele who had been sent for came skipping in. She was just in time, for the astonishment of Monsieur and Madame Champlion at the unexpected meeting was so great that they were about to make some remark, and it is more than likely that they would have said something awkward or not quite apropos.

As Alice no longer had any reason for leaving the room, she stood aside, endeavoring to overcome her emotion, while the little girl, like the badly brought-up child she was, drew near Jean, and pulling him by the sleeve of his uniform, said:

"So it is you, sir, who are to inherit all these beautiful jewels."

"Certainly, Mademoiselle," returned the young man, with a touch of irony, "unless you only consider me a fellow competitor,"

Competitor was a long word which Angele did not understand; and but little pleased with the welcome she received, she left the officer and sprang on her father with a vivacity which made the gilded wood of the arm-chair groan.

"So we will soon have the entertainment of which you are always talking, ices, flowers and jewels on the cushions; when will it be, father?"

And as Monsieur Champlion tried to put her off, glancing at Jean with an annoyed look, the young man bent politely saying that his only wish was to ask Monsieur and Madame Champlion to choose the day that best suited them. As he drew somewhat aside from the family group, an animated discussion suddenly began.

He calmly made his way away from the tables and chairs towards the window where Alice was seated, her hands clasped on her knees, and watching pensively the young man's progress towards her. She had regained her calmness, and the only thing which showed the violent emotion through which she had passed was that humid, trembling something which the face preserves after weeping. She was like a statue of isolation in the shadow of the great plush curtains,

alone before the three people who were whispering, and it seemed to Jean there was a mute prayer in the glance she gave him. He gradually drew nearer and nearer, half frightened lest he might discern in her eyes the signs of a fresh fit of weeping. It was the first time in his life that he had drawn a maiden's tears, and he was afraid that they might begin again. He felt himself somewhat in the position of one standing in front of a new piece of machinery which he was obliged to set in motion, and very naturally touched the wheels cautiously lest his fingers might be caught in the cogs. Alice may have divined his alarm, for she half rose and greeted him with a faint smile.

"Don't be afraid, it is all over," she said. "I am perfectly self-possessed now." Then after a short pause, she continued simply, "I was touched for two reasons; a while ago Madame Semiane's dance was the last at which my poor father was present, and then I little thought that you would ever see me like this," and she stopped, feeling that her voice was beginning to tremble anew.

"Is Monsieur Champion your guardian?"

"My guardian?" looking at him with astonishment. "But did you not hear that our entire fortune was wrecked? I am Angele's governess."

"I had certainly heard of the loss of your fortune, but I did not think that—"

He stopped, not knowing what to say to express his sympathy with such a double misfortune.

"Yes," she answered sadly, "everything went. I was offered this position in the third letter of condolence I received the day after I put on mourning. It was very soon, was it not? And I must acknowledge it hurt me. I would have preferred to have been given the opportunity of speaking first, but I knew how I was situated and I accepted. I asked only to be allowed to wait a little while, and three weeks were granted me. That was long enough, for I had to commence some time, and so I have been here now a week."

"But your relations, your friends?"

"I have none save some distant cousins. They all agreed I did right, and my friends said so, too. After all, why should they act otherwise? We two were so much to each

other that every one else seemed an outsider, and our life was such a wandering one that we had only acquaintances who sought us for our wealth."

Jean felt that the young girl's tone carried a touch of bitterness, and he involuntarily thought of the crowd of young men who had once surrounded her.

"Well!" cried the banker in a voice of triumph, "it is all arranged. What do you say to the day after to-morrow? Too short notice, perhaps?"

Jean answered coldly that it was all the same to him; and as he bowed to the young girl as he bade her good-bye, Monsieur Champlion added:

"Old friends? It seems strange how people meet each other."

Jean replied shortly that he had the honor of being introduced to Mademoiselle de Valvieux some short time previously. Then saluting the mistress of the house with coldest courtesy, he made his adieu, leaving the banker so annoyed at his haughtiness that he repeated several times during the evening,

"Heavens, what a prickly stick, every knot covered with thorns. But bah! I have all I want, and I care but little about the rest."

CHAPTER VII.

Jean had inferred from the banker's manner that he intended to give a most expensive entertainment, but even he was not prepared for such a display of luxury. A row of gas jets ran along the whole front of the mansion, bringing the stonework into bold relief, while the red-liveried footmen, half hidden by the shrubs which stood before the *porte cochere*, looked like immense poppies stuck here and there, amid the dark and brilliant green foliage. One could see that the banker would have been only too willing to ornament the whole street, and that it was with the utmost regret that he dared not carpet further than the edge of the sidewalk. A crowd of curious bystanders stood outside to watch the arrival of the guests and the young officer. Jean had walked, and as he slowly approached the entrance he grew more and more angry, thundering against Monsieur de Champion every invective against vanity known in the French language. For a moment he thought of returning on his ship, letting the guests get out of the scrape as best they could. But he knew he would only have to come back again another day. The banker had the law on his side, the terms of the will read, "In the presence of as many witnesses as possible," and the worthy Monsieur Champion was determined to use every syllable to his own advantage.

So Jean had to yield to fate, and put himself in the hands of two fine red-liveried footmen with the most melancholy resignation. One of them took his cloak, another made him cross a whole suite of drawing-rooms still empty, but which were literally sparkling with lights and gildings, ushering him into the very last room of the suite where Monsieur Champion, in tight-fitting evening-dress and white cravat, bursting with satisfaction, playing in reality the rôle of the dragon of the Hesperides. Little Angele was right: the

entire collection was arranged if not exactly on cushions, at least on brilliant red draperies which showed in bold relief the exceeding richness of the gems. The perfect indifference of the young officer, and the quiet way in which he listened to the banker's exclamations, visibly disconcerted this last-named gentleman, and made him look as mystified as a child in whose hands a soap-bubble bursts.

Yet, after all, as he said to his wife, "he had what he wanted, and what did he care for anything else?" Seeing that it was impossible to obtain the least word of praise, he left Jean in the place of honor in which he had stationed himself a moment before, and pleased himself innocently by walking up and down the rooms through which his guests would soon have to pass, so that he himself might imagine what impression the gorgeousness of everything would make on them.

Jean stood for a moment looking round him with astonishment at the tables laden with gems, asking himself what he was going to do with all that quantity of gold and jewels, when he heard some one talking close beside him. Turning his head, he saw by the fluttering motion of a curtain, that the room was only separated from the adjoining one by this silken stuff. He made a step or two in that direction, coughing significantly, but Madame Champlion's voice (it was she who was talking) was as loud as her appearance denoted; and Jean, vanquished by her powerful contralto, was obliged to listen to what was said.

"I repeat, Mademoiselle, that I must insist on your remaining this evening. I know quite as well as you what custom requires from those in deep mourning, and I do not intend to ask you to do anything which is not right. It is not a ball or even a concert, and you will be no more out of place here than you would be visiting a museum. Angele is very anxious to see the people who are coming, and you can well understand that I would not have a moment to watch over her. You must replace me, and this, after all, is part of the duties of your position. We were told by those who recommended you for this place that you were accustomed to evening parties and society; now is the time to show if you are. And if you used to like them so much, at

the end of half an hour you will be just as much pleased as any one else."

Then not caring to wait for an answer which she probably did not care to hear, Madame Champlion went into the drawing-room, her voluminous skirts making a noise like that of those metallic sheets which are shaken behind the scenes of a theatre to intimate the approach of a storm. What the ear led one to expect was confirmed by the eyes when she was seen. A product of the wildest imagination, her toilet was arranged in such a way that it was composed of as much as is generally worn by at least a dozen women. The three kingdoms of nature were to be found there, and if it wanted all the colors of the rainbow, it must have been either through ignorance or a mistake, for certainly the lady would have been only too happy to place them there. The whole thing produced on Jean the effect of a reception which he had once attended in a negro court in one of the islands of the Pacific. Only on account of the difference in the latitude he was obliged to pay his salutations in good French, which he did without the shadow of a smile. Before Madame Champlion had time to reply, her husband reappeared. He had heard the noise of carriage-wheels; the guests were coming, and it was necessary that the host and hostess should both be ready to receive them at the door of the first drawing-room. The husband and wife went away, and the young officer found himself once more alone. The curtain still swayed a little to and fro. Every moment he expected to see Mademoiselle de Valvieux pass through with her black dress, her pale face and that air of sadness which made it so hard for her to obey such an order as the one she had just received.

"If I were in her place," he thought, "I would not give way. This woman is absolutely shameless in her selfishness." And he recalled the emotion the young girl had shown a day or two before, just because she had seen in him a part—though ever so small a one—of her past life. The sincerest pity for her rose in his heart, and he pictured her, alone in those vast reception-rooms filled with strange faces, where bitter souvenirs would most assuredly crowd around her.

"Poor girl," he thought, "my presence here can only pain her."

And he asked himself, he, who was feeling so young, so strong, so free from every tie, why fate had made the lives of man and woman so different. Misfortune amongst women becomes doubly so, because it leaves them almost helpless, while to men it only seems to open new fields for their energies. On one side, to be almost obliged to gain one's bread in some servile condition, whilst on the other, a man of no greater intelligence or resolution than his sister has the right to aspire to everything, even to glory. "What a stupid thing society is after all," he said to himself. "Every time I land, I get more and more disgusted; one of these days, perhaps, I shall make up my mind to inaugurate a revolution, or else refuse ever again to set my foot on dry land."

By this time the reception-rooms were full. Monsieur Champlion was delighted; it was even better than a crowd, it was a jam. Ladies in evening dresses, young men with gardenias in their button-holes passed and repassed. They spoke and laughed loudly, and above all, as they had come to see, they looked round with the most impertinent curiosity. But one would have thought that all these people had paid for their admission when they came in, and that they wanted the worth of their money. High above the tones of the conversation, the wing-like flutterings of light dresses, the short, quick noise made by fans as they were opened and shut, sounded the voice of Monsieur Champlion like an uninterrupted bass. While he was reading, if he came to some unusually important jewel he involuntarily raised his tones. It seemed as if big figures made him open his mouth. Then his lips almost closed, as he mentioned some ordinary little ring, and the murmurs of the crowd drowned his voice till something rare again came into the catalogue. It was most amusing to observe these changes; and Jean, who was standing in a window recess, laughed at them silently.

The young heir was himself counted in among the curiosities that evening, and everybody thought it most natural that it should be so. He knew he was the cynosure of hundreds of eyes as he went and came, spoke or kept silent; as in old times people were wont to look at the king's *petit levee*. Greatness had many things to put up with. Being,

however, somewhat impatient both by nature and training, Jean became tired very quickly of his prominent position; and, far happier than the kings of long ago, was able to get rid of it by hiding himself. Scarcely more than five or six faces were known to him in the crowd, and as he had peremptorily refused to allow any of his comrades to come to the ceremonial, he was able to take possession of a quiet retreat behind a grove of camellias. The room which adjoined the drawing-room devoted to the jewels had been transformed into a sort of winter garden; and just at the very end was a well-cushioned easy chair, which was a delightful temptation to the young man who cared so little for society. From there, he could overhear as much of the conversation as he wished, which meant none of it, or only that confused noise which is made by the murmur of many voices, which seemed at that distance like the indistinct rumble of thunder or like the murmurings of the sea after a tempest. For a moment or two he was fearful lest he might be obliged to quit his quiet retreat; for Angele, who was in everybody's way, went through the flowers like a will-o'-the-wisp.

"Like a stinging insect," thought Jean. But the same whim that had brought her there made her leave almost immediately, and with a sigh of relief the young officer felt himself once more lord and master of his solitude. With eyes closely shut, he isolated himself as much as he could from these surroundings, which were so little in consonance with his own ideas, when suddenly he heard close beside him something like the fluttering of wings.

"Can it be possible," he asked himself, "that the worthy man has had birds' nests placed amongst the foliage in his conservatory, or perhaps in this case, with such a surplus of plants the birds had grown in one night, as in that wonderful atmosphere of Doctor Ox's, surcharged with oxygen." He turned his head, and saw behind a quantity of shrubs Mademoiselle Valvieux seated on a low chair. Her mourning was especially striking, and amid the brilliant lights and bright-hued toilets she seemed like one of those warning angels, spoken of in so many legends, who suddenly appear in the midst of a feast to remind the mad revellers of the misery and sorrow which exist upon earth. The poor girl

evidently had to make herself as little as possible, drawing her sombre gown as close to her as possible, scarcely daring to breathe, her only desire being to remain concealed. It seemed to Jean as though it were one of the children in Perrault's fairy tales, hiding in the house of an ogre; and he was again stirred to the very depths of his heart by the pity which he felt for her.

It was easily to be seen that what she longed for most just then was to be alone, and he thought it better not to speak to her till a little later, when she would have regained sufficient calmness to appreciate the tones of friendly sympathy. So he, too, took as much care as possible to remain unperceived, glancing carefully at his sword which he held between his knees, and the golden tassels of his belt, which might rattle against the scabbard. He breathed as softly as possible, and never did young mother watching over a cradle try more carefully to prevent the slumbers of her little one from being disturbed than did this great strong sailor vouchsafe that moment of rest which a girl he scarcely knew was taking between two flowering shrubs.

CHAPTER VIII.

It might have been five minutes later, and Jean was already beginning to think of his own affairs, when he was startled by the sudden entrance of five or six men. He did not stir, however, and the group did not advance very much beyond the threshold of the door. They were a set of those useless beings who seem born for no better purpose than to be authorities on the correctness of neckwear, and the latest and most fashionable bow. Conversation was as vapid as might be expected.

"I tell you, I saw her," cried one of them.

"The dear girl does not seem to take her mourning very much to heart," said another. "Her father is not dead more than a month."

"Bah! She thought the month was a year, no doubt. Is she as pretty as ever? Black ought to be most becoming to her."

"Not at all. She looks thin and yellow, and leanness is far from being becoming to any woman."

"When I think that I— Never was catastrophe more lucky or at least, never did one come more in the nick of time."

"That's a fact, D'Astier, you were one of her most ardent admirers, weren't you? You must have come precious near 'popping the question.'"

It would have been a matter of only twenty-four hours. As we picked the petals from our marguerites, we had come to the word 'passionately,' and I was on the point of talking to her father when the crash came."

"You were as lucky as those who managed to get rid of their Turkish bonds in time."

"Exactly. But you can well understand that I do not care to meet her just yet, so keep shady. I hie myself to 'peaceful fields.'"

"For all that she was a magnificent creature. Do you not regret her?"

"Do you think there exists in this world a woman beautiful enough to make the words 'marriage for payment of debts' sound pleasantly? They are somewhat more agreeable than the words 'prison,' or 'suicide,' but that is all."

"Is it possible? Were things as bad as that?"

"That's just where they were."

"And since then what has happened?"

"A good old uncle, the very model of the ones on the stage, died just in time to save me from——"

As soon as Jean heard the first words of this conversation, he rose from his chair to stop it, so that Mademoiselle de Valvieux might not hear what was so unfitted for her ears, and which would wound her so cruelly. But his movement, too noiseless to be heard by the talkers, had started Alice. She turned round quickly, looking like a timid fawn fighting for her life with the dogs that suddenly sees a new enemy start out from behind the brake. At the first glance she recognized the young officer's uniform through the leafy curtain, and half rising she made a sign to him, putting her finger on her lips and shaking her head to command silence. The young man was thus obliged to sit down again, very unwillingly, but not daring to do otherwise. Again in absolute horror at the brutal truths which fell on the poor young girl's ears he tried to interpose, but she had once more, without even turning her head, made a sign with her hand even more resolutely than before.

Nothing could be more melancholy than this scene which took place in the twilight, as it were, of this magnificent reception-room so poetically adorned, in that mass of foliage which looked as if it were arranged for a lovers' meeting place. The young girl stood alone listening to the brutal things which these men said about her, losing at once all the girlish illusions which life is generally compassionate enough to take away one by one. It was something most pitiful to see, and to add still more to her humiliation an involuntary witness stood beside her dumb, because of his respect and in obedience to her wishes, but who could see her blushes suffuse her brow.

For a moment it seemed as if the young men were about to go away; then one of them called his friends, and motioned him to sit down on a divan which he had just seen, and the conversation continued without any interruption.

"Do you not know, D'Astier, that you were in much greater danger than you imagined? Did not Madame de Valvieux die of a lingering disease?"

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that? A lingering disease is the polite name given to consumption, when its victims leave girls behind them who later on may want to get married?"

"A million and a consumptive wife. You want to kill with regret, you heartless executioner? Let me believe her as healthy as a wood-cutter's wife, or I will sink into despair."

"Suppose you were to try to console her a little? What is she doing here? Is she a poor relation, or a companion? It wouldn't be at all bad to visit a house where there is a governess like her and——"

"Stop, gentlemen," suddenly cried a clear and haughty voice, which made the six heads turn around as rapidly and with the same precision as though they were executing a military movement. "No doubt you will think as I do, that there has been quite enough said on this subject, when I tell you that Mademoiselle de Valvieux has not lost a single word of your conversation."

"Nor you either, it seems to me, sir," retorted one of the young men.

"Nor I either, sir; you are quite right."

"So you have been playing hide and seek in that nook yonder!"

"Yes, each one of us was seated quietly in different corners when your graceful appearance chanced to surprise us. When I wished to get up to remind you that before making an examination of conscience aloud before a clump of shrubs 'tis well to walk all around them, Mademoiselle, to whom I have not yet had the honor of speaking this evening; (I am in the same plight as you, Monsieur D'Astier, though for other reasons, however) —— Mademoiselle de Valvieux became aware of my presence for the first time, and she stopped me, without leaving her corner, by a significant gesture——"

"To which you obeyed of course, if not quite to the letter, as we can see for ourselves, at least until——"

"Until—permit me to interrupt you—only to continue the sentence which you were kind enough to interrupt before I had completed it—until the experiment which Mademoiselle de Valvieux was so courageously trying became more than I could bear. She tried, as I saw very well, to force herself to listen to the very end to all the villainous things which were being said here, thinking, no doubt, that vile as the conversation was, it at least gave her a wonderful opportunity for reading the human heart."

"Sir!"

"And surely she can never better learn from life what is meant by lowest meanness and thirst of gold."

"Have you any right, sir, to insult me in the name of this young girl?"

"So little that, as I have already told you, Mademoiselle de Valvieux has not done me the honor of talking to me this evening. When I firmly realized by the way your conversation was turning, that my respect would injure her if I obeyed her and did not make you stop. I came forward, and learned for myself, extraordinary though it may appear to you, all that I have just said."

"Disinterested knight, brave champion of misfortune. It is a noble rôle!"

"And one of such ancient date in our house that I cannot see anything ridiculous in it. It is nothing more than an old custom. When I see a cat that wants to strangle a bird, or a great big fellow knocking down a child, I use my foot on the animal, and my fist on the man. You will acknowledge that there is only a step thence to my respectful sympathy for a defenseless woman standing alone, attacked by six men at once."

"Then, sir, you will answer for everything you have said this evening."

"Not only that, but for everything I thought, and that is very much worse. Now, Monsieur D'Astier can retire if he will, to those peaceful shades which he loves so much, and I beg to remind you, gentlemen, that if you have any curiosity to visit a man-of-war, I belong to the 'Naiad,' which

is stationed in the Bay of Toulon, and even if I do not happen to be there, you will be sure to find several of my comrades who will only be too glad to welcome you."

Then saluting the young men with a haughty gesture, Jean stepped back a little, leaned against a gilded table, and began to watch the movements of the crowd with the quiet curiosity of a man who has nothing better to do. For a moment the young men whom he had just left hesitated. D'Astier even made a step or two towards the end of the room, as if he were ashamed of what he had done, and wished to offer an excuse, but he turned back quickly, and went out shrugging his shoulders with the gesture that signifies in every language of the world. "Bah! what do I care."

Then with their heads raised high in air, and a careless walk, like people who were not in the least hurry, they passed through the whole suite of reception-rooms, saluting or chatting a moment with the coolness of invited guests, imitating the English phlegm. Jean, who stood where he could see to the very end of the reception-rooms, watched them go out. Then when he saw the last one disappear, he returned quietly to the room he had just left, and walked towards the place where Mademoiselle de Valvieux still was.

She was seated on the same little low chair, surrounded with the same arch of verdure; and she pressed her beautiful hands with such anguish against her face that the traces of her fingers were marked in red on the delicate skin of her brow. Jean was beside her before she was aware of his approach; then with the gesture of one bending down towards a sick patient to speak more gently, he knelt before the young girl. She trembled, and even gave a little scream, as she saw the young man kneeling before her; for another second he remained there, without saying a word, looking frankly into the astonished eyes which were turned towards him. Then when Alice, regaining her self-possession, was about to speak, he said in a grave and simple tone:

"Mademoiselle, you know my profession. I am twenty-eight. My name is Jean de Kerdren, Count of Penhoet, and I come to ask you, will you honor me by becoming my wife?"

Her surprise was so great that she could not find a word

to say, and the twain so strangely united kept silence for a moment or two, while the piercing voice of Monsieur Champlion was heard every now and then.

"Engraved and cut by Benvenuto Cellini."

"Bought in 1875 from the Marquis de Gensac for the sum of ten thousand francs."

"Valued in 1880 by Mannheim of Paris, at twenty-one thousand francs."

"Stomacher."

However grave and serious both those young people felt, they had to follow mechanically word for word the names of the catalogue, and it seemed to them that neither of them could utter a word, until they they had heard all the particulars about this stomacher. Still all that lasted only a moment, and before Jean had time to feel himself in a ridiculous position, Mademoiselle de Valvieux succeeded in overcoming the kind of stupor in which all her faculties were steeped.

"Monsieur," she said eagerly at first, and then hesitating a little, "I wish I could tell you the feeling of infinite gratitude in my heart towards you; it will last till the end of my days. You have done so much for me this evening—and now it is too much—for surely you can well understand that at present—I cannot—"

She stopped, unable to repress the beating of her heart; and the first tears which she had shed that evening trembled in her eyes. Jean arose; a flash of those brown eyes, seen through the prism of these drops of water seemed to him so strange and touching that he continued still more gently:

"I understand you, and I would not for the world weary you this evening by one single word of entreaty. To-morrow, or as many days later as you choose to appoint, I will come back for my answer, and believe me, I do not want you to be grateful, but that you will be happy, if you will allow me to take care of you."

Bowing low before the young girl, and without even once thinking of imitating Monsieur D'Astier and his followers as he passed through the long suite of reception-rooms, he left the banker's mansion. Monsieur Champlion had just finished the recital of the catalogue, with a heart full of pride, and the heir was at liberty to go.

Nevertheless, his departure annoyed a great many of those present, and the general opinion of the guests of that evening was that the Count de Kerdren was horribly over-rated, and that the trait of his disposition which people were accustomed to term reserve merited the name of rudeness.

CHAPTER IX.

Next day about one o'clock a letter was handed Jean on board the "Naiad." This letter was in a mourning envelope, and at the first glance he saw from whom it came. It was of course from Mademoiselle de Valvieux, and this is what she wrote:

"Sir:

"I tried to tell you yesterday what I thought when you made your generous proposal, but I was unable to express what I felt, so cruel was my mortification. To-day I wish to repeat to you, earnestly, seriously, what I tried to say yesterday, so that later when you think of your chivalrous generosity towards me, you will also remember my deep gratitude.

"Do you recall the answer you made Madame de Semiane about a month ago? She asked you to dance with me, and when you refused, she said, 'When will you ask her then?' and you answered, laughingly, 'When her contingent of admirers desert her.'

"You forget all that, no doubt, and I too had forgotten it in the midst of my recent misfortunes, and now your jesting answer so lightly spoken has come to pass. My sadness and my isolation have been so terrible since my father's death that I thought there was nothing more in this world could hurt me, yet just then the bitterness of that humiliating conversation which I overheard by chance wounded me to the very soul.

"Thank God, there does not remain in my heart a shadow of regret for the men who have revealed themselves in all their vileness. I felt just as I would if I had closed my eyes, and found suddenly that there was no longer a place for me on solid ground, and that I was walking on empty air. My heart failed me, and my faith in all things seemed dead.

"Then you defended me bravely and nobly, and I forgot my pain in a moment. As I heard your loyal voice, I took no note of the words to which you replied, and now I can recall nothing more, save the generous way you came to my help.

"It was more than enough to make me keep you forever in grateful remembrance, and yet you would fain do something more for me. My loneliness could not have been more complete when you approached me in the kindest and most delicate manner, and offered me all that a man can give in this world—your protection and the happiest of lives—gifts which I value most highly, and which I would gladly accept, could a life's devotion be accepted thus lightly. We have seen too little of each other for your proposal to be prompted by any other motive than chivalrous generosity, and you can well imagine that if I ever could have deluded myself with the idea that I was capable of producing an impression, all illusions on that subject have been torn away from me by the truths which I heard yesterday. Again, what was said about my dead mother's health should make me still more guarded, and so, all that remains to me now is a profound gratefulness towards you, and a terrible fear which has been tormenting me since yesterday, lest your generous help may involve you in such grave complications that I dare not say what they are, and I beg of you not to cause me any remorse, for which I never could console myself, and now less than ever."

Jean read this letter from beginning to end; reread it and finally folded and put it back in its envelope.

"She is a loyal girl," he said. "Happiness often comes un-awares."

Then without thinking a moment further, just as if the letter had been a most decided acceptance, he ordered a boat to take him to land, sprang out of his bark into a carriage, and after having given the order to drive to Monsieur Champion's, he sat so quiet that any one seeing him, would have thought he was asleep. He was not, however, and the eyes which flashed through the dark cloth curtains were full of determination. The whole night had been spent in thinking over the events of the evening, his unexpected engagement, and to-day he knew full well what he was doing. So he

went straight ahead, determining to overcome every obstacle.

Mademoiselle de Valvieux was quite right when she said that chivalrous generosity alone had inspired the young officer—chivalrous generosity and nothing more. The first time he saw her, he had scarcely looked at her, and did not even like her; her extraordinary beauty and gracefulness were to him mere objects of luxury to be packed up in a quantity of cotton wool. When he met her some time later, her sorrow and desertion had touched him with pity. He felt the same sympathy for her as for those little Italian girls, who on snowy days huddle together in the door-ways crying and showing their hands red with cold. Though her sorrows were of the mind and not of the body, she seemed to produce the same impression on him. The evening before she had appeared to him under a different aspect.

Misfortunes seemed fairly to rain on her poor head. It was too much, and when he saw her so brave before the brutal words which hurt his sentiments as a gentleman, his sailor-like instincts were aroused, and he could not help holding out a friendly hand to the poor young girl, just as he would have done it to a swimmer in distress, who was looking in vain for help. It was horrible to think that she would henceforward have the right to believe that all words are lies, all hearts rotten to the core; that at the very beginning of her life she would have seen under its vilest aspect the loathsome thirst of riches, and that there would be no one to undeceive her, and prove to her that there still remained in the world some few loyal hearts.

He was thinking of all that but vaguely, when suddenly with the impulsiveness characteristic of his strong individuality, the idea of his offering his hand and fortune to Mademoiselle de Valvieux crossed his mind. He was angry at the men's meanness, not one of whom dared advance, so it remained for De Kerdren, according to the custom of their ancient house, to spring to the fore; and without reflecting for a moment, just as rapidly as he would have rushed forward to meet the enemy's fire, if he found that his side was short of men, he came to the rescue of the young girl, and made her the strange proposal.

She was unhappy, in mourning, and alone. Jean knelt down to speak to her, as his ancestors in old times were wont to bend the knee before the Queen, and he offered her the homage of his life, as men did in the feudal times when one became vassal and the other sovereign by the vassal simply placing his hands in those of his lord. When he returned on board he thought over his position as calmly and with as much common sense as if he had planned it for a long time beforehand. All at once his life was completely changed, his life with the ocean for a help-mate and companion was over, and forever the career to which he had intended to devote himself, heart and soul, free from every tie, was now closed to him, and henceforward, like many another man, he must weigh above all the pleasures and the interest of his wife. It was strange to find himself in such a predicament, and stranger still in that it had not been wrought by love.

Once, however, decided on doing anything, he was not in the habit of looking backwards, and he always finished whatever he began, no matter what the cost might be. He was determined that every one of his new duties should be performed to the best of his ability; he told Mademoiselle de Valvieux that he would make her happy, and he was determined to carry out his word.

Therefore the young girl's letter of refusal left him as calm as ever. He thus caught a glimpse of her disposition, and he was delighted to find so much delicacy and loyalty in her, but that did not alter his resolution. He was not conceited enough to think that he had inspired her with a sudden passion; but when she acknowledged her only motive for refusing him was a fear of too great a self-sacrifice on his part, he felt that he was strong enough to convince her; and when Jean had set his heart on anything he had an authoritative way of insisting on getting it, a magnetism strong enough to conquer any one.

He was obliged to ask for Mademoiselle de Valvieux twice; for the first time the servant answered that Monsieur Champion was at home. The banker was in the habit of talking so loud and acting so pompously that he had managed to give his servants a great opinion of his importance, and the

idea of the Count de Kerdren asking for any one else in the house, before he saw him, appeared to them something extraordinary. But as Jean did not care to have any one else mixed up in his business, and had not the slightest intention of explaining anything to the worthy Champion until everything was arranged, he allowed the servants to think what they liked, and in a few moments Alice and he were alone together in the reception-room into which he had been shown. Whatever way he set about convincing her, he managed to find the right one, for in less than a quarter of an hour he had overcome all of Mademoiselle de Valvieux's scruples.

He was too frank, however, to pretend to be in love with her. But a young girl's heart is sometimes easier caught than one imagines, and the future that Alice saw before her with this man for companion, he who in her eyes had all the prestige of a hero, seemed to her to be one of perfect happiness. With the simplicity which a secluded life during his boyhood had imparted to him, Jean guessed nothing; and he considered the young girl's emotion as the expression of feelings of deepest gratitude to which she had alluded in her letter. He found it very sweet, however, and he promised himself that he would often make that young face smile; but he could see no further than that. On one point alone Mademoiselle de Valvieux had insisted, and that was the question of health. Jean then took her before a mirror, asking her if she looked at all delicate, and she had to answer no. In reality there was a magical change in her appearance of to-day from yesterday. Her complexion had never been more brilliant, and the vivacity of her eyes and the sweetness of her smiles seemed as though old age itself could never change them. As frankly as Jean had spoken about his own sentiments, he answered Alice's questions about Monsieur D'Astier—questions which he asked in a faltering voice, fearing lest she might arouse his resentment anew. That very morning at nine o'clock, he had met the young society man, and wounded him in the right arm at the first pass, but the sword stroke was not serious.

It was just enough to make D'Astier remember that it was wise not to trifle either with women or naval officers when

Jean was around, and yet it was not serious enough, added the young man, to interrupt his course of gay philosophy for any length of time.

Now the next thing to be done was to determine where Mademoiselle de Valvieux was to go. The idea of allowing her to stay any longer at the banker's was distasteful to Jean, and he knew that however actively he might try to get through with the necessary formalities, yet the law moves slowly, and he had thought of asking Madame de Semiane's hospitality for a few weeks for his affianced bride. Unfortunately, the letter which the Countess had written to Alice when she heard of the loss of her father was dated from Spain, and in it Madame de Semiane said that she intended staying for a long time in Granada, and that perhaps she would even go over to Morocco.

It thus became necessary to think of somewhere else, and the most suitable place in every respect seemed to be one of the convents in Toulon where boarders are taken. Jean would hasten up matters as fast as possible, and after the wedding he would take his wife to Kerdren. He intended when his furlough was at an end to ask to be sent to some naval port, and his property being not more than a few miles from Lorient, he would be able to live in his own home. It was more than likely that this favor would be granted to him, and thus little by little he could make his young wife accustomed to her new surroundings.

"You know," she said, "I do not wish to interfere with your profession; I shall become a true sailor's wife, see if I don't."

He asked her laughingly if she intended to go all alone, and have herself recognized as lady and mistress by the vassals of Kerdren. So things were arranged as Jean had proposed; indeed, Alice agreed to every thing which the young officer wished. Her lips and her eyes said yes at the same time, and from the very first moment she placed herself under his guidance, yielding her will to his as much as was possible for any human being to do. She had felt herself so isolated for a whole month that now she acted like one of those tame birds which after a short trial of liberty, not only alights on the hand that wishes to take it back to its nest, but actually

nestles in it with happiness. The next thing to be done was to inform Monsieur and Madame Champlion of the approaching marriage of the young governess. Great was their astonishment--and the coldness of Jean's manner was not enough to forestall a flow of compliments and suggestions, and Mademoiselle de Valvieux was told so many times that her good fortune was most extraordinary, that before the end of ten minutes they managed to make her feel ill at ease. All the habitual politeness of the young man could not then prevent him from taking out his watch and saying that he had only a few moments to talk over the plans of Mademoiselle de Valvieux with Madame Champlion. That worthy dame hastened to offer her assistance in shopping, as that appeared to her one of the most indispensable preliminaries to a marriage. But when she was made to understand that the only thing asked of her was to release Alice at once from her engagement as governess, and to take her to whatever convent would be selected, they appeared to her so trivial that she was almost about to refuse. However, she wound up by saying that Alice's release might take place at once, and she agreed to take Mademoiselle de Valvieux anywhere she liked.

As for the banker, he called Jean aside to tell him with a sly wink that he had guessed how matters were the very first day, and that he would be only too glad to lead the future Countess de Kerdren to the altar. We who know Jean's sentiments can well imagine that the prospect was not at all alluring, and that the young officer did not care to receive his wife from the short pudgy hand of the banker which was gesticulating before him.

He thanked him, however, and went away leaving the whole house of Champlion as much astonished as if some wandering comet had come there to ask for a few extra rays with which to adorn its luminous tail.

"I am sorry you are so rich," said Alice, with the same melancholy smile she had worn an hour before, as she accompanied her betrothed to the door.

"Why?" he asked her laughingly; "would you like to be obliged to spin wool for my clothes, as Queen Bertha of the long foot did for King Pepin?"

"No, only because I am so poor," she answered, still more sadly.

"Well, would you prefer things the other way, and let people say I married you for your money?"

"No, but what will they say of me?"

"Of you? They will say that you brought me the rich jewels of your youth and beauty, and that I am a lucky man to be able to give them a worthy setting. Believe me, that is what they will say," he continued affectionately.

CHAPTER X.

The following day a single cry ran from one end of the squadron to the other. "Kerdren is going to get married! Kerdren!—And in such a strange way."

"One evening he went ashore to receive a legacy, so he said; the next morning he fought a duel, apropos of some philosophical problem which his adversary and he had discussed in a somewhat too lively manner. Then in the middle of the afternoon, suddenly and without any preparation, he returned an engaged man!"

The young officer had never been accustomed to do anything like anybody else, and it was impossible to keep account of the whims and fancies which often startled his comrades with the suddenness of the bursting of a bomb-shell. But this time the matter was serious, and as a young midshipmen said in vulgar parlance, "The whole fleet literally threw up its arms towards the skies in rank amazement."

Jean could not have acted in a manner more inconsistent with everything that he had thought and said previously, and his comrades amused themselves heartily at the quiet way in which he renounced all his theories.

They made allusions to "departures saddened by wives in tears," to "spoiled careers," to "the only true seaman an independent husband with a heart of steel," and so forth, until such a quantity of these sayings were recalled to him that it seemed as if Jean must be buried beneath their weight. He listened to everything as quietly as King Francis the First, when he wrote at the bottom of an edict which he knew would arouse a storm of discontent the celebrated "such is my will and pleasure."

When they learned that his betrothed, whom he had seen only three times in all, was awaiting him in a convent, just as the noble damsels who, in the romance of chivalry, were carried away, sheltered for a time beneath the protecting

wing of a nun until the wrath of the parents subsided. And when they found out that they didn't know her age, or anything about her family, they began to ask each other if the young lieutenant's originality did not touch on the verge of madness.

The very name of Mademoiselle de Valvieux had astonished a great many of the officers. How and where had he seen the young girl of the flowers, and what sudden whim had made him take her for his wife, he who only a short month before had hardly spoken of her? All these interrogations remained unanswered for, whether Jean answered seriously or jestingly, both ways sounded so much alike that it was impossible to say what was true and what was not. A few days later, having managed to arrange things as he wished, he left for Paris so as to obtain from the Naval Minister a permit to be stationed at Lorient. Then he went to pay a short visit to Kerdren, so that he would assure his young wife at least a moderate degree of comfort.

At first he thought of taking with him several upholsterers and to put some rooms into their hands, but Alice had opposed this project, and begged him to have things remain as they were. He told her at first that she did not know what she was asking for, and that as the house had been shut up for ten years, it must look like a charnel house. But she had insisted as bravely as her timidity towards him, which grew greater every day, permitted, and he had promised her to touch nothing.

To hear him speak one would have thought that the place was a ruin; and he talked about ghosts, bats and owls as if the four winds of Heaven played through his ancestral home. The truth was that the Castle of Kerdren, castellated like so many churches of Brittany, was one of the most beautiful mansions it was possible to imagine; and as for ghosts, there were none there, except its legends of them, or, more glorious still, the historical souvenirs of which it was full.

Queen Anne of France, when she was still the Duchess Anne of Brittany, and adored by all her faithful subjects, had spent many a day there; and it would certainly have been in bad taste to complain if one were to meet her some evening, wandering through the great halls with her long-trained gown and high coiffure, such as she is seen in the pictures

of the time. The idea of changing, however little, one of these links that bound the past to the present was very unpleasant to the young girl; and so it was arranged that all that was to be done was to open wide every door and window to let in the air and sunshine, and to brush away—that is if there were any—the cobwebs which the old care-taker might have left in some of the corners.

Nothing was more extraordinary than the relationship between the betrothed couple; if anything was wanting to the strangeness of this marriage, it was supplied by their daily interviews in the convent parlor. Jean used to come at different hours, and pull the big bell with such resolution that the Sister who performed the office of porter knew who was there, and opened the gate without looking. Then, guided by her, he would cross the great court-yard covered with sand, and encircled with old-fashioned groups of shrubs, surrounded with box, from which stood out statues of the Blessed Virgin or Saint Joseph with their robes half hidden by the foliage. Sometimes the curious eye of one of the pupils would catch sight of him through the blinds of the infirmary, through the slits of one of the Venetian blinds, and then at the next recess there were long, long stories told about the handsome officer.

These stories were told in whispers, and sometimes,—could such wickedness be possible!—it was the ample vestment which draped one of the statues beneath which the forbidden chat took place.

In the parlor, paneled with oak half-way up, Jean would sit down on one of the straw chairs which were arranged around the room in such perfect order that he never even thought of taking one out of its place. Then putting his feet on one of the little mats which were placed before each seat, he would await the arrival of his promised bride, with his eyes fixed on a reproduction of one of Michael Angelo's works.

Alice was always accompanied by a nun holding her beads in her hand, or a big black book under her arm; and while the young people were talking, she would touch her beads one by one, saying her decades quietly or turning over the leaves of her book one by one.

Benevolent as was the look she cast at them, the shadow

of the long white head-dress seemed to wrap them around, as it were, and gave a certain air of austerity to the little group. And before this being whose life would go on day after day, so uniformly that one day could be only distinguished from another by the date, it was strange to hear so many projects for the future. —

Alice grew more and more timid every day, and as her enthusiastic tenderness for Jean became greater, she became more reserved. She felt, and rightly, that nothing sinister was concealed beneath the grave kindness and lofty courtesy of her companion, and her dignity as a woman warned her to hide the love for which no one had asked her. Still, she was far from being wounded by this indifference and with a charming humility, she looked up to Jean as the shepherdesses of yesteryear, whom kings used to choose for their mates, must have looked up to the Prince Charming who took the cloak from their hands to place in its stead a dainty golden sceptre.

Only, she was afraid of his eyes, which she felt flash upon her when she entered the parlor like a cloud of little stars, and of his voice, which grew softer as his eyes grew more brilliant when he spoke to her.

Though she did not know it, she got into the habit of closing her eyelids when she entered the parlor, and of speaking softly, under her breath, as though the air of the convent had given her in a few days the quiet and gentle manners of a little nun.

The natural result was that Jean, as he saw her growing more timid, became more and more fatherly in his manners in spite of himself, and in an endeavor to put her at her ease frightened her more and more. He wondered why Mademoiselle de Valvieux was so little like the letter she had written, and what she had been on the first day of their betrothal; but he had always considered it a husband's duty to be the attentive and somewhat grave protector, of a young head more or less frivolous and changeable; and he felt, too, that her position as an orphan made it very hard for her. Therefore he hoped that time would restore to the young girl her natural gaiety and the sweetness she had shown on the day of her betrothal.

CHAPTER XI.

Jean and his young wife had been installed at Kerdren about a fortnight. The marriage took place at midnight,—quite a common custom in the south; the church nearest the convent was so small that, few as the wedding guests were, the ceremony was a bright and cheerful one.

The admiral commanding the squadron had asked to be allowed to give the young lady away, and Madame de Semiane had travelled so rapidly that she managed to arrive in time to accompany her young friend both to the Mayor's office and to the church. Jean had telegraphed her at once, hoping she would be able to come, and he felt profoundly grateful towards the Countess for taking his bride, who, poor child, was so alone in the world, into her quasi-maternal care at that supreme moment of her life. It can easily be imagined how astonished the Countess was when she heard the news; and had she arrived a little sooner, she would have expressed her surprise in no measured terms. Jean's answers to her questions had enlightened her but little, and she could only explain things by thinking, as of old, that the young man's character was a perfect enigma.

The church was lit up so wonderfully that it was fairly dazzling with light. A good many of the sailors and all the groom's comrades were present. Most of them had sent flowers to the bride, and the bouquets imparted quite a home-like air to the suite of rooms which Madame de Semiane had taken in the hotel.

The ceremony over, the guests went to the hotel, and were invited by the Countess who, with the exception of the bride, was almost the only lady in the party, to partake of a dainty supper of meats and sweet-meats; so the young couple were not at liberty to start on their journey till two

o'clock in the morning. Alice had resumed her black dress; and full of emotion at beginning her journey into a land unknown, her heart beat violently, fearing at one and the same time that she might love her husband too much, and yet be unable to compensate him for all he had given up for her.

Jean had taken her away in a post-chaise, as amongst his prejudices was a horror of railroads for newly-wedded couples. He disliked the noise of the steam, the sly smile of the officials as they passed through the compartment or the sleeping-carriages, the mixed crowd that stood on the platform, and the intolerable smoke. So he had determined that his wedding trip should be free from all this turmoil, and he had even laid out a complete map of their route—where they were to take on relays of horses, where to dine and where to sleep—beforehand with his postillion, so that his wife might be spared from hearing him give orders.

The journey from the south of France to Brittany had been one long pleasure trip. Sometimes they had alighted to gather flowers, to climb a hill or to rest beneath a clump of trees—a trip so romantically poetic that fifty years might thus be pleasantly spent. They admired the leisurely way in which our fathers used to travel.

It was high noon when the young couple arrived at Kerdren. The day was as beautifully fine as though it were sent on purpose to add a last charm to the reception which the tenants of De Kerdren had determined to offer the new Countess, who was touched to the very heart when, on alighting, every man present waved his hat or cap in the air and greeted her with shouts of welcome. They were dressed as if they were going to a party; so Madame de Kerdren had an opportunity of seeing Brittany under that picturesque aspect which is so admired by tourists, and which becomes rarer and rarer every day. The men wore a short jacket trimmed with black velvet, accompanied by the enormous hats which brings Chouans to one's mind; the women were nearly all dressed in black likewise, with that severity of costume which enhances that distinction of type peculiar to the brunettes of Morbihan, who are nearly all pretty

and disport themselves with a grave dignity very different from the ways affected by peasants in other provinces.

Some of the old men, *des anciens*, as they were called, still wore their white cloth costumes embroidered on the back with a representation of the Sacred Host, and trimmed on the waistcoat with a woollen galoon of some bright color. With their feeble eyes and their far-away look, their long white hair and their speech in the old Breton tongue, in which one could just manage to distinguish that one word of "welcome" which they had just been taught in French, they seemed to belong to the days of our ancestors. The sailors, dressed in dark blue, their caps jauntily perched to one side, moved boldly to and fro from group to group. Their captain belonged to them, understood their language, knew what their life was, and that was more than enough to make them feel at their ease, as they explained it to their friends whilst awaiting the arrival of the carriage.

They felt at their ease with Jean alone, however, and were embarrassed in the presence of this young woman who was unknown to them. As she descended she seemed to intimidate them all, whether they were young or old, even the very sailors, bold as they were.

"I honestly think that you are frightened at one another," said Jean laughingly, at his wife's emotions, as he offered her his arm to take her through the crowd.

Startled at first, she quickly regained her natural grace, and soon managed to conquer the good-will of every one, whether men or women. Beauty is a charm which appeals to all natures, whether cultured or rough and primitive; and the charming creature who smiled bewitchingly at every one, offering her dainty hand so cordially, soon turned every one's head. She took from the quantity of bouquets with which she was presented, a spray or two of broom, one of the emblematic flowers of Brittany, like the heath and reed, as though to show how close to her heart was her new home, while the sheafs of tiny golden stars dotted here and there through the black fur on her cloak, looked like a poetical representation, as it were, of her young and charming royalty.

The ovation was wound up by dancing and a villagers'

feast, which, accompanied by the juice of barrels of cider, made a spread worthy of the wedding of a Gamache.

Whilst the old-fashioned round was being danced, the young couple had taken their first meal in the great dining-room, where sixty guests were wont to sit at their ease, and in which their table seemed a mere islet, lost in the midst of an ocean of space. Beside her place on a silver salver, Alice had found an immense bunch of keys which ranged in all sizes, some made of metals, some large as the keys of a dungeon, others marvels of dainty carving; and as she turned to her husband with astonished eyes,—

“They are the ensigns of your power,” he said, smilingly. “We do not act like Bluebeard here; everything is thrown wide open to you, and all is yours. However,” he added laughingly, to stay the tears that he saw glittering in his wife’s eyes, “I will not exact that they be exhibited at your girdle all the while.”

At first their days were spent in wandering through the castle, and then they started out to explore the neighborhood. Whenever they were together Jean treated Alice with the same delicate courtesy and thoughtfulness, but the intimacy did not become any greater.

He had shown her all he thought she would like to see, with the care of an accomplished guide, but he never dreamt of taking her into the rocky caves where the sea had crooned him a lullaby during the dreams of his childhood and youth, and were so peopled with his lonely memories that they seemed to him like holy places. And she was so much afraid of being in his way that she never went anywhere with him without a special invitation; and so, when her husband wandered alone on the strand, she stood aloof as though she were penetrating a closed-in garden without right.

While he was thus occupied she went through the numerous apartments of the vast mansion of which she knew so little, trying to breathe in once more the souvenirs of the past which remained in those ancient rooms like the faint perfume sweet things leave behind them, and which seems to cling more closely to the places left untouched by the changes of fashions. Madame de Kerdren did not show

the zest of a profound antiquarian; if she found some remembrance that did not go back more than twenty years, she was amply satisfied.

When she got back, she would tell her husband all about her long expeditions, and in a couple of strokes of his pencil, he would draw the plan of the story in which she was lost. She had, however, but few lonely moments, for Jean took as much care of her as though she were a distinguished guest; and though she would have preferred fewer ceremonious attentions, and more freedom of intercourse, nevertheless she was passionately grateful to her husband.

She often thought of what she would say to him, if she only dared; she would try to talk, and what she learned to say was as sweet as the heart of a young girl thinking of her first love. But she was like those gilded birds of fairy tales who only sang when they were alone; and as soon as she found herself with Jean all her timidity came back.

She had no trouble in assuming at once her duties as mistress of the house, with all the sweet dignity of a young wife who assumes the reins for the first time, and very soon the great drawing-rooms on the ground floor began to look as though they were inhabited.

The young officer's holiday was nearly over, and he began to think once more with a certain pleasure of resuming his duties. The change in his life had been so sudden, and there was such a strong contrast between the active life he had led from childhood and these last weeks of inactivity that his want of regular occupation weighed on him almost unconsciously.

The renouncing of solitude for the society of another, however tender and poetic the sentiment may be between two people, necessarily involves a continual self-denial, and sooner or later the very highest natures are apt to perceive it.

So the first morning on which Jean's horse, ready saddled, was brought round to the door, he sprang upon it as joyously as a child. His horse was far from being as dear to him as his ship, but he enjoyed the glorious gallop which made the wind blow against his face almost as if it were the sea-breeze. He felt invigorated by his rapid pace, and invari-

ably he would find his young wife awaiting him on the terrace, with the greeting of a bright smile.

From her window she could see him approach at the end of the avenue, and Jean little knew how impatiently she would scan the horizon. Still he used to worry at the way in which she spent her days, and he scarcely ever came home without bringing her a book or something he thought would please her. He would have liked her to have some agreeable acquaintances, and he had paid several visits in the neighborhood, though he cared but little for that occupation. But they formed no intimate acquaintances, and as Alice's deep mourning prevented her from accepting any of the invitations which came to Kerdren, she was almost constantly alone. Yet she never grew weary. Her mind, somewhat given to musing, grew absorbed in the beauties of the country, charming at this period of the year, and to all that she saw, to her every thought, the poetry of her love added a powerful charm.

But all that was difficult to explain to her husband, and though she showed him every time he questioned her about the way she passed the day a basket filled with work, he was worried to think that her only amusements were her needle and thimble.

The apartment which the young wife had chosen for her own was one that had been the favorite room of Queen Anne, and she had taken up her position in the great deep window-seat; staying there all the time, writing, working, dreaming until she gave up work and books, and began to gaze out of the window. Her instinct was seldom at fault, and she could almost guess the moment of her husband's arrival. It seemed as though she could see him coming from afar, with that mystic second sight which could pierce the longest distances. She used to see him coming along, admiring his gracefulness and the quiet boldness with which he checked his fiery steed. When he arrived near a great oak,—and it was always the same tree,—she would advance to meet him, trying to control her looks and her smiles, as she used to do when she went to meet him in the convent parlor.

One day, however,—Jean may have gotten home a little

sooner than usual; or perhaps, the clocks were somewhat slow,—it so happened that he found no one waiting to receive him. Perhaps Alice, as she was walking in the park, was detained, entranced by the charm of the lengthening days, or it may be that she had walked into the village to distribute the bundle of clothes which grew bigger and bigger every day beneath her skilled fingers, and amongst which her husband saw so many little gray dresses that he asked her if she had started an orphan asylum. All of that might have happened very naturally, but nevertheless it produced a somewhat unpleasant impression on the young man. He had grown so accustomed to the smile of welcome which he was wont to receive from two fine eyes that he involuntarily imitated his horse, which was turning around on all sides looking for the accustomed piece of sugar from a fair white hand. Like the Sybarite he was, the steed evidently preferred his feast when offered by the same fair hand, and moved uneasily, rubbing his nose against his hoof as if to show his impatience.

The case was plain, however; the rider and the horse had both been forgotten that evening, and while the noble animal drew near his stable, pawing the ground and showing his impatience, Jean entered the house tormented with a vague anxiety. As he was half-way up the staircase, he heard the notes of a piano. Never had his wife intimated that she possessed any talent for music, and he had naturally concluded that she knew nothing about it. As he went upstairs, he heard more and more clearly.

The piano had that tone peculiar to an old piano which had not been played on for some time; but the voice which accompanied it,—for the young woman was singing,—was charming, fresh and soft and sad. The melody floated through curtains and doors, sweet and captivating as the song of a siren, and Jean stopped on the threshold, remaining as quiet as though he were listening to a bird singing on a branch. As soon as the last chord was struck, he put his hand on the lock, and knocking gently on the door by way of warning he went in. She sprang up, blushing beneath the curls that played on her forehead, calling out with an accent of regret—

"So it is you. I am so sorry I did not get down in time."

"You must not excuse yourself," returned Jean somewhat ceremoniously. "You must not think you are obliged to come every day to pet Samory."

There was such involuntary stiffness in his accents, and in the care he took to put himself altogether out of the question, that his young wife grew disconcerted.

"But I love to do it," she returned; "I dearly love horses."

And then she became once more timid, and she began to play lightly a few chords, without finding a word to say, feeling herself awkward, and sorry not to be able to simply say to her husband that the meeting with him every day was the happiness of her life, the thing to be looked forward to during her long afternoons, while he, dusting his boots with the handle of his whip, accompanied the chords struck by his wife, till finally the silence seemed so interminable that he made an effort to end it.

"I did not know you played," he said. "If you had told me of your talent, I should have procured you a piano. This one is unworthy of you."

"It is in perfect order," she replied eagerly, "and if you will have the kindness to find me a tuner at Lorient, so far as my voice is concerned, it is just right for me. My slightest wishes are so quickly granted by you that I was afraid of talking to you about music before I knew whether my touch was as good as ever."

Nothing more was said on the subject just then, and a little while afterwards Jean left the room to change his riding-suit. Nothing suited him that had been laid out for him in his room, and while he searched in his drawers for one thing or another, feeling so impatient that he was surprised himself, he thought, with a shrug of his shoulders: "What a nuisance it is to grow accustomed to a regular and monotonous life; the smallest incidents trouble and disturb one."

During the dinner, Jean spoke only of the news of the day, telling his wife about the launching of some new vessel, or relating some accident that had happened to a stevedore. Not a word was said about a piano or singing, and

Alice, who ever felt timid and anxious in the presence of her husband, asked herself if she had not displeased him in opening an instrument which had belonged to his mother. The evenings of the young couple were usually spent in a small drawing-room opening into the dining-room, where they seemed somewhat less isolated than in one of the large reception-rooms. Alice would seat herself at her table with her work, that everlasting feminine resource, while her husband would wander about in an absent-minded way, touching the bric-à-brac placed on the table, turning a statue or a vase on every side, laying it down and then taking it up as if he had never seen it. Sometimes he would draw near his young wife, and pushing a folding-chair close to the table and placing one knee upon it, would begin to play, like a man who did not know what to do with his fingers, with the scissors or gold thimble which he found within his reach.

"Do you want this," he would ask, showing her a piece of linen or woollen goods.

"No," she would reply.

Then he would begin to cut it into little bits, making a little heap of his clippings, until he saw his wife remaining idle on account of the scissors which he had appropriated, and watching his movements with a smile.

"I beg your pardon," he would instantly cry.

Then he would return her scissors, pushing away all his clippings, laughing at his absent-mindedness and beginning his unending walk. He acted thus like a man who did not know what to do with himself. Alice did not deceive herself, but she felt herself powerless. She was still too little intimate with her husband to be able to talk with him that she did not dare once to bring up the subject, and he never thought of telling her about his childhood, a subject that she thought about incessantly, gathering all her souvenirs within her own breast, as she also kept hidden there all her feelings. Jean did not do any carpentering, had no turning-lathe, and would not even allow himself to smoke before his wife.

"Why, I can do it all day long," he would say when she tried to insist upon this point.

What he said might be true, but it did not prevent Alice from regretting her husband's over-strained courtesy, when she saw him rolling between his fingers an innumerable quantity of cigarettes as he walked around the room, which he would then throw into the fire one by one as soon as he thought of his wife. He often read to her aloud, and on such evenings Alice was happiest, for then she enjoyed the double pleasure of seeing him occupied and of hearing his well-toned voice express so vividly all she felt. When love-scenes were described Alice trembled. That voice which, when it spoke of the most ordinary things moved her to the heart, touched her strangely when it described scenes of love or tenderness. The reader disappeared, as it were; she forgot the pages he was turning, and with bent forehead to hide her blushes, with her needle idle between her fingers, she allowed herself to be carried away by the charm of her dream, imagining that he was saying to her all she heard.

A young woman of twenty can hardly listen with impunity to a young and charming man who is reading to her about things that might so easily become realities, especially when her whole heart should belong to him, and like Francisco de Rimini, Alice might easily have exclaimed, "That evening we read no more." It is more than possible, however, that Paolo's voice trembled when it came to that page of love which painted his sentiments so vividly to the beautiful Italian, whilst Jean's, though he was an excellent reader, remained animated, supple, and perfectly even.

CHAPTER XII.

One evening, however, as Alice was rising from the table and was going towards the small drawing-room, Jean stopped her half-way.

"Suppose we go up-stairs," he said. "The piano is still there."

"I am not so passionately devoted to it as all that," she answered, laughingly; "I can do very well without it this evening; unless—do you like music?" she added quickly.

"Very much indeed," answered Jean.

"Of course, if you wish it."

And both of them went up-stairs, preceded by servants carrying the lamps which were already lit in their accustomed sitting-room, and logs to light up the great fire-place of carved oak. The piano was placed in a kind of library or study whose walls were hung with green tapestries from Flanders; the chairs were of dark oak, and the beams of the ceiling just marked with a thin line of gold that stood out from a deep red back-ground. The room looked sombre; the deep tones of the hanging being but faintly lit up by the light of two lamps that, almost absorbed by the tapestry, seemed to die away in the corners like water drunk up by the sand.

As she stood beside the fire-place, Alice watched the fire burn, amused at the bright flame which caught the logs on all sides, as if it did not know on which one to begin, and then resuming its patient work until it got to the very heart of the wood. When the servants went out she, hastily as though she was about to perform a task, walked towards the piano.

It was some distance away near a window, and she began to shiver as she left the heat of the fire and the brightness of the lamps. As he heard her step, Jean rose also

to follow her, seeing that the instrument was not well placed. "Allow me," he said quickly; "you are not comfortable there."

And without waiting for any answer, he took hold of the piano with his two hands and rolled it before the fire as easily as a child moves a plaything. Replacing the stool before the instrument, he took a little screen of foreign wood, gilded in a strange, barbaric fashion, put it behind her chair, and then threw himself into an arm-chair.

"Now," he said, "I am listening with all my ears."

These words were more than enough to put the finishing touch to the emotions of the young wife who, already feeling somewhat intimidated at the thought of playing before her husband, was so overcome by so many marks of fond attention that her heart began to beat in such a way that she lost all presence of mind. She sat down murmuring her thanks, and said after a moment of silence:

"It is not enough to tell me that you love music; what kind do you like—the classical or more modern composers? Which do you prefer, sad things or gay?"

"Whatever kind you prefer," returned Jean quickly.

"I prefer the kind that best suits you," she answered gently. "Tell me your favorite composers and it is possible I can play something from memory from one of them."

"I am afraid not," said the young man, smilingly. "What you call my composers are those who have sung lullabies in unison with my dreams. What I really love are the songs of the winds and the waves; the waves in anger, and then which suddenly grow calm and peaceful, and which die along the strand with long expiring noise as though a harp-string were touched for hours and hours, it remaining always as full and pure. Can a human hand represent all that? I know not; you ought to divine it better than I. If any one has done so, play me some of his pieces, and you will have found my favorite composer without my even knowing his name."

Alice reflected for a moment, thought of what she could play from memory, and then quietly began a nocturne of Chopin's. When she had finished, she began another and yet another; and passed quickly to his celebrated impromptu;

the wailings and loud chords of which are suddenly changed into exquisite sweetness. This music, which is more touching than all other, because of the anguish which one hears sobbing through it, seemed to Alice to be most like that which her husband described.

The music of no other composer, it seemed to her, had those sudden impetuous changes like the cry of a human voice interwoven with lamentations as sad as the sighs of the waves, touching one to the very heart's core, and yet a moment later the sadness is effaced by the sweet tenderness of the melodious chant.

As soon as Alice had struck the first few notes, Jean, captivated by those strange yet entrancing chords, left his place, and leaned his elbows on the piano. From where he stood he could see his young wife, taking in at one glance her blonde hair with its varying tones that seemed, in the lamp-light, like rays of softest moonlight, and every detail of her slight but beautifully shaped figure. She sat up straight; her pose a most graceful one, though her hands, white as snow, moved rapidly over the keys, seeming like the velvet wings of two butterflies that were forever fluttering. Without thinking that his gaze might trouble her Jean watched and watched her; the delicate purity of her exquisite face, mingling with the charm of the music, penetrated into his heart. The melody seemed wedded to her beauty, and he fell into a reverie where the soft, rose-tinted cheeks of his wife, above which fell her long dark eyelashes, and the delightful melody produced by her fingers, seemed linked together in some indescribable way. Vividly alive to all poetical impressions, he speedily became so overcome with emotion that his eyes were wet when his wife stopped playing. Then she timidly asked him, raising her head:

"Do you like this music? Is this your composer?"

"Do not tell me his name," he answered quickly. "What you played is something that every one feels in the depths of his heart, and I cannot even guess by what witchcraft some chords can touch one so, seeming to divulge one's inmost sentiments. Were I a musician, I would fain compose such pieces, and it seemed to me as if your fingers found intuitively all that you have just played."

"No! no, indeed! that would be far too great an honor," she answered quickly, laughing at his peculiar way of showing his appreciation of Chopin.

And she felt so delighted at the thought of the pleasure she had given her husband that her lips trembled, her laughter ceased, and she looked down once more at the keys of the piano-forte.

"And what about the sea?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"He must have been lulled to rest by it as I used to be myself long ago," said Jean gravely. "Some of those chords could only have been learned there."

They were silent for a moment or two; then Alice half rose from the piano.

"Will you not sing to-night?" asked the young officer.

"My voice is not worth listening to after such music," she returned, shaking her head in gentle negation.

"But I have already heard it."

"Oh, but it was a long way off."

"The door was not very thick," he replied, insisting on his advantage.

Without further pressing, she sat down again, and when eleven o'clock struck, she was still seated at the piano. Her voice seemed to please Jean as much as the impromptus and nocturnes, for he stayed in the same place drinking in untiringly melodies, reveries and barcarolles. Alice chose music that most resembled the song of the sea, only stopping now and then for the few words of encouragement with which Jean thanked her. Suddenly the striking of the clock made him start, and regaining self-consciousness, he said hastily:

"What a shame! I must have tired you to death."

"No, no," she answered, getting up; then she added in a lower tone, "My poor father and myself always spent our evenings thus."

"Ah, perhaps I have hurt you," asked Jean eagerly.

"Do not think so for a moment," she returned as quickly. And then growing bolder, she managed to say, "I am so happy to be able to give you pleasure."

Jean murmured a few words of thanks, and they again

became silent, whilst Alice silently reproached herself with having told her husband her love; while he, as she nervously shut the piano, bent down and kissed her hand. "My thanks to the fingers which have charmed me," he said softly.

This was so unexpected that Alice trembled all over, and went to her room unable to do more than make a sign with her head and smile faintly.

The next evening was spent in much the same way, and gradually the young man felt more and more attracted. He no longer walked about the drawing-room, looking as though he wanted something to do; the music took entire possession of him, and he loved to listen as much as his wife loved to play.

The library grew to look more and more inhabited every day; and the tuner having put Alice's piano in perfect order, it seemed likely that Alice would continue to spend hours and hours in the little nook behind the screen. Things went on as they had done the first evening; Jean occupied the same place invariably, and Madame de Kerdren grew more and more astonished at seeing how changed were her husband's manners from the first evening they passed together.

"How much he loves music," she used to say to herself sometimes, and a half-jealous feeling would rise in her heart. She became indignant, as it were, at the amusement which absorbed him so completely and gave him so much more pleasure than she herself was capable of, forgetting that it was the charms of her rare talent which held Jean captive at her side, while she felt badly at the idea of his always thinking of something besides herself. "Why cannot he love me?" she would ask herself again and again with her usual modesty, during her long quiet afternoons. "Our marriage has been an act of chivalrous devotion and nothing more on his part; he did not choose me, and I have never heard a word of love from him."

Her logic was infallible, but that did not prevent the young woman from sighing many a time.

As for Jean, ever since that day when he had found the terrace empty, he all unconsciously made his horse go faster when he came to the end of the avenue, raising

himself in his stirrups and patting his horse's neck as he said to himself:

"Come, old fellow; has any one been thinking of us this evening?"

He could almost have answered the question in the affirmative, yet slight as was the doubt it was enough to arouse an indescribable feeling in the young man, piquing his curiosity and security of old days, and making him smile with involuntary satisfaction when he saw Alice standing in her accustomed place.

CHAPTER XIII.

One evening, to Jean's great amazement, when he was at about a hundred yards from the court-yard, he saw a foot-man seated on the fence, who was evidently watching for him; who, rising as Jean drew near, came deferentially towards his master.

"Would you please get down here, sir?" said the man respectfully, adding, answering beforehand the question which trembled on Jean's lips, "Madame has just fallen asleep, and her maid is afraid the noise of the horse might arouse her too brusquely."

"Fallen asleep," repeated Jean, turning round and staring at the servant. "Has anything happened to her—is she sick?"

"She has not been well since about noon, I believe, sir."

"What can be the matter? Why was I not sent for?" repeated the young man, asking half a dozen questions so rapidly that it was impossible to answer him, catching the reins in his hands at the same time, as though to jump from his horse. Then, seeing something in the footman's face, he suddenly stopped, and remembering what had been told him, sprang to the ground, threw the bridle to him without uttering a word and was gone before the servant had even thought of taking Samory to his stable, leading the animal a long way round behind the castle.

Jean literally sprang up the stairs to the first floor indignant with himself, when he heard his spurs resound against the steps. When he came into the ante-chamber of his wife's room he found there, as he naturally expected, her Breton maid sewing and ready to answer her mistress' faintest call. With a gesture he beckoned her out to the landing, and as soon as she had shut the door:

"What is the matter?" he asked her imperiously.

"A bad head-ache, with a touch of fever," replied the maid promptly, feeling it was no time for long explanations. "Madame went out into the park about eleven o'clock and returned half an hour later with such an attack of dizziness that she was obliged to catch hold of the banisters to walk up-stairs. As soon as she got up, she rang for me to bring her some fresh water. She had gone out without her hat, and while I put bandages on her head she told me about a sun-stroke she must have got out of doors, she thought."

"I should have been sent for immediately," interrupted Jean.

"We thought of that, sir," said the Breton maid; "but Madame would not allow us to do so. She said it would amount to nothing. She still complained of her head, and did not take any lunch. The fever then came on and she was not able to sleep until a moment or two ago; that is the reason that I ventured to send you word while you were still on horseback."

"Where is the doctor?" asked Jean. "Has he been sent for?"

"Madame would not allow us to do so; she said rest would be all-sufficient."

Jean, who no longer listened to her, stepped hesitatingly to one side of the door, and then added

"Tell me when your mistress wakes up," he said, turning into his room.

For more than two hours he walked up and down. The dinner had been kept back and a carriage sent to Lorient for a doctor.

Alice still slept, and in the profound silence which every one throughout the castle respectfully observed, the waiting seemed inconceivably irritating to the young officer. This great calmness seemed to denote a certain amount of indifference which made him impatient. He was indignant at the doctor because he did not come; at the servants for staying quiet; at himself for doing nothing; and he asked himself at the same time what he was to do for his sick wife—what help he could give her who was so timid, while he was so inexperienced. It had never before occurred to

him that his wife might get sick, and he knew no more what to do with her than if some one had brought him a humming-bird with a broken wing, and begged him to set it. Just as his thoughts were lingering over that image, his wife's maid came to tell him that her mistress was awake. He followed her without a word, astonished to feel his heart beating, and as anxious as though he was about to see some dreadful sight. And yet nothing could have been simpler; an immense lamp with a rose-colored shade lit up part of the room, while the rest was in a kind of veiled twilight, and his wife was lying on a reclining-chair with a quilt thrown over her feet. As soon as she saw her husband, she stood up and held out her hand affectionately towards him.

"I am sorry," she said; "I fear I have disturbed you—made you anxious, perhaps. But it is all over now."

"You certainly have made me anxious," he returned quickly. "I have had the blackest things in my mind for the last two hours. Tell me what was the matter with you, and why did you not allow them to send for me."

"It was not necessary, I assure you," she answered evasively, not daring to say that she was afraid of annoying her husband by sending for him. Then, changing the subject, she told him how she had gone out bare-headed in the noon-day sun, and about the giddiness which was the consequence of her imprudence, assuring him, however, that sleep had set her to rights again.

"You have taken dinner, I trust," she asked as she finished.

And as Jean answered somewhat indignantly in the negative, she tried to rise as though to go down stairs and preside at her husband's repast.

"What are you thinking of," he exclaimed almost angrily, "your hands are burning; but here, at last," he added, with a sigh of the utmost relief, "is the doctor."

The doctor fortunately was of the same opinion as Madame de Kerdren; her slight attack had merely been caused by the springtime sun, which is oftentimes very treacherous. He congratulated her in getting off so easily, saying that often very serious accidents were owing to the same cause. Still her fever and the flush on her forehead necessitated her lying absolutely still.

He spoke a little more openly to Jean; an erysipelas might set in if care were not taken; and as the young man expressed his horror—

“Do not allow her to talk;” he said, and he added as he closed the carriage-door, “By rest I do not mean so much that she should stay in bed, but that she should have absolute quiet.”

Nothing is more detestable than a kept-back, warmed-over dinner, and what is worse, eaten alone while one is uneasy. Jean felt it that evening, and as he managed to expedite his dinner in a quarter of an hour, he had all the more time to dislike it. Besides the trouble and anxiety he felt, his young wife's absence made everything appear very desolate, and he could not help wondering why the simple fact of her presence so enlivened that immense dining-room. He had grown accustomed to surround her with tenderest care, and he missed the grateful smile with which she was wont to reward his slightest effort. At last he grew so tired of sitting alone that he got up and went out.

It was a charming night when Jean found himself at the confines of the park; instead of returning he put his strong, nervous hands on the wall which rose to about half his height and cleared it with a single bound.

The sea was at its full; he could hear the noise of the water from where he stood, and drawn by the smell of the wet seaweeds which the waves had thrown on the land, marking their passage by long wavy lines, he stood at the very edge of the water. It was high tide, and scarcely two yards of dry sand were between the rocks and the sea; but that was all that Jean wanted, and throwing himself down, his head sometimes turned towards the sea, sometimes raised heavenwards to admire the stars, his face wet with the spray of the waves, he could imagine himself as in past times between the sky and the sea.

Feeling himself back in his old place, all kinds of recollections came crowding to his mind, and he began to think of his comrades, of his ship, musing on what part of the Mediterranean it was now floating, what kind of weather it was, what was going on there, imagining himself keeping his watch as of old beneath the clear moonlight. But even

while his fancies lingered there, he suddenly came back to Kerdren and to the realities of life, and, forgetting both ship and comrades, he murmured in a low tone, gazing gravely at the waves, "I hope she is asleep." He immediately got up, unable to remain any longer, and without even allowing himself to be tempted by the rising of a silver half-moon, he returned home. As he did so, the promptness with which his thoughts had changed, struck him suddenly. "And yet, after all," he thought, "what more natural than to be worried about the child for whom I am in a certain measure responsible."

He went back the same way, still feeling somewhat nervous, crushing with a strange pleasure the twigs which the night winds had blown in his path.

As he arrived in the court-yard the dining-room clock began to strike; he could hear it through an open window, and he stopped to count the strokes. It stopped at the ninth, and Jean, convinced that he was mistaken, took out his watch, a repeater, and pressed his thumb quickly on the spring. The sharp, clear sound of the watch answered him back nine times and then stopped. Jean put it back in his pocket with a movement of impatience; it was just two hours earlier than he thought it was.

Since the doctor had gone away, Alice was sleeping peacefully, so her maid said; so that he could do nothing else but retire to his room, and after having yawningly written a few letters, he went to bed, weary and disappointed.

The next day the doctor repeated his prescription, and Jean left for Lorient where he was obliged to attend an official reception, having before him the agreeable prospect of a dinner and an evening like the last one. But what was his surprise when, as he was about to urge his horse to jump the gate, he saw Alice seated in an arm-chair, sheltered from the last rays of the setting sun by an immense umbrella which she had taken through over-precaution.

He went towards her with an expression of pleasure which brought a blush to her face, and then instantly added in a grave tone:

"But I understood you had been forbidden to go out."

"The doctor, who had some business in the village, had

the wise idea to call in as he passed by, and he allowed me to get up if I would promise to be very good," she repeated playfully. "Do you think I have done wrong?" lifting her eyes to his face with that anxious timidity which pervaded her every action in her husband's presence.

"If you still feel tired, certainly," he returned; "if not, you cannot tell how happy I am to find you recovered."

CHAPTER XIV.

"At last I found what I have wanted for you," remarked Jean a few days later. "Duhamel for the past two weeks has been telling me about a wonderful horse trained for ladies' riding; his sister, who is an excellent horse-woman, has ridden it for two summers, and she claims that the animal is perfection itself. I saw him and tried him, and if you wish it, I will have him here within two days. Do you wish to go to Lorient to see him or would you prefer we should take him on trial for a few days, so that we might judge what he is like ourselves?"

"No! no, indeed!" returned Alice; "I have perfect confidence in your judgment, and, provided he has not the famous yellow skin of D'Artagnan's steed, I feel perfectly sure that he will be perfection itself."

"He is as black as coal," answered Jean; "that is the color you like best, is it not? I think I have heard you say so. I am now obliged to go to Lorient only once a day, and I long to make your life somewhat gayer. A nun is a worldly creature compared with you."

"Still, I can assure you, I never grow weary."

"If that is so, you are luckier than I am, for—by the way," he added, suddenly changing the subject, "you never asked me a word about how I spent yesterday evening."

Alice asked mute questions with her eyes, and he vividly described how uncomfortably he had spent his evening, telling about the dinner he had so hastily gobbled up, the concert with which he had tried to amuse himself, and how, after a school-boy's walk beside the sea, he found his old friend tiresome, and at last had actually quarrelled with the time-piece because it was only nine o'clock when he thought it eleven.

The original side of her husband's character was the one

which Alice knew least about. He had been always most attentive to her, but the gaiety about which Madame de Semiane used to tell her, and which made him occasionally a regular purveyor in point of starting all kinds of amusements must have totally disappeared, for she never discovered the slightest trace of it. This made her imagine more and more that every kindness Jean showed her was merely for duty's sake, and she used to say to herself that there was nothing spontaneous about it, as his very disposition had changed. So she gladly welcomed this unexpected change, and did her best to be as lively as he was. Shortly afterwards, the horse was duly installed at Kerdren.

It was a magnificent steed, somewhat fiery, perhaps, but splendidly trained, and as rapid as became the purity of his blood. He had not a single defect, not one bad habit, and his trot was as equal and perfect as possible. He was as black as jet, as Jean had told her, but had a white star on his forehead, and with his slender legs and swan-like neck, he seemed an ideal horse for a lady.

Madame de Kerdren had ordered a black mourning habit because of her bereavement; it had come at the same time as her saddle and trappings, so everything was ready for them to make a start. Their first ride took place on a delightful afternoon, when the sun shone through somewhat misty clouds.

"Do you ride well?" asked Jean as he helped Alice into her saddle.

"Well, at least, I have a firm seat," she replied laughingly.

He carefully arranged the folds of her trained skirt, seeing again if the straps of her bridle and her stirrup leathers were firmly buckled, though he had already tried them before. They started at a walking pace at first, which they gradually increased into a short measured trot as though they were studying each other's horsemanship.

It did not take Jean very long to find out that not only had his wife a "firm seat," as she had just told him, but she rode with perfect grace and ease. At the end of a quarter of an hour or less, she was able to hold her horse in hand and manage him with an ease that came from long practice, while the animal with the sure instinct of a horse

that knows himself to be properly handled, lifted his head still more proudly.

Like nearly all *svelte* women, Alice showed to great advantage in a riding-habit. Her natural grace and her perfectly-shaped bust could be seen to perfection, and she had a charming way of holding her head without stiffness, and of moving her shoulders in unison with the motion of the horse.

The black cloth of which her riding-habit was made seemed moulded to her figure, but with the perfection an artist might arrange a drapery on the shoulders of a statue, while her straight collar boldly defined her satin-like neck.

Her good taste had made her eschew that exaggerated style which, anxious to be decidedly new and somewhat fast, leaves prettiness out of the question, making the present shape of the riding-habit a narrow sheath, very different from long graceful pleats formerly worn. She had managed to make a compromise between the old and new fashion, and her skirt was wide enough to drape prettily.

A high hat appeared to her somewhat too ceremonious; she thought she might frighten the wood-peckers and chaffinches as she rode through the quiet country roads, and had just tied the usual gauze veil round her felt hat.

The effect was charming. Everything she wore suited her; the open air, her animation and even that little touch of boldness caused by her somewhat violent exercise gave a more decided character to her face than it usually had.

Jean gazed at her again and again, asking himself what had so changed his young wife, not guessing that it was he who had learned to see her beauty; and he found a sweetness he had never before known in the exchange of words and smiles necessarily short on account of the rapidity of their ride.

On their return he complimented her on her skill with sincerest admiration, but telling her very little of what he thought and felt; indeed, things were so confused in his own mind that he scarcely knew himself of what he was thinking. His praises made his young wife blush, and at the same time her eyes grew moist as she thought of her father who had been her professor and guide.

From that time on their rides continued without interruption, and every day they each felt more and more pleased with each other's society. Almost unconsciously Alice became more and more like her former self. She was very proud of her husband's praises, and his admiration for her which she felt increasing daily excited her to new efforts. Unusually modest, she thought Jean's change of manner was merely the natural consequence of a pleasure shared in common, but as he showed himself so gay and animated during their rides, she became more and more delighted with the exercise.

As for him, he could hardly have explained his feelings; so far from analyzing them, he never dreamt that he had changed in any particular. He thought it was merely the gaiety of the springtime and those delightful rides which so affected him.

These rides generally took place in the morning. They left early in order to enjoy the beauties of the early dawns of May which were so full of poetry, and often and often the noise of their horses' hoofs was the first sound heard on the stony roads.

A thick mist, white and fluffy as cotton, the breath of the earth, as it were, rose from the fields, a vapor breathed forth by a thousand invisible mouths, fresh and perfumed as everything belonging to the country; cobwebs floated softly from tree to tree, reflecting all the colors of the sun in their delicate tracery, and every blade of grass, the innumerable thorns of the thistles, glistened with drops of water. Dew is unusually plentiful in the early morn, and often would Alice give forth little cries of admiration, showing her husband the delightful effect of a spider's web hanging like a fairy hammock from one leaf to another, and glittering with jewels on every mesh. Then, as they entered the woods, the air would become colder and more bracing, while from every side could be smelt that delightful odor of damp moss, wet wood, wild peppermint and all the thousand tiny flowers which open together, each doing their best to perfume the air the moment daybreak began.

Beneath the trees, Jean felt himself strangely touched. The avenues were sometimes very narrow, and they had to

go in single file. Alice would go on first, trying to hold in her horse as he browsed on the herbs which rose above the soil, while letting Samory choose his own way, Jean would devote himself to watching his wife's pretty figure, above which floated her white veil like a will-o'-the-wisp. Alice would turn round in her saddle from time to time, pointing to Jean a hare as it bounded across the path, or an impudent-looking black-bird saucily whistling; and her youthful and confiding smile, her exclamations of pleasure made Jean so happy that he would willingly have gone much farther with her than to the edge of the forest.

Alice almost always, as she took nothing before she left, would stop in some farm-house and ask for a cup of milk still warm from the cow, the milk of the same little Breton cows she used to ask for specially at the Jardin d'Acclimation in Paris, but which had such a different flavor here. It was truly a delightful genre picture to see the young couple stop at these country farm-yards, the cavalier gallantly handing his companion a red-flowered cup full of creamy milk, and watching her drink with his hands on the reins, whilst a group of children, their arms behind them and their curious eyes peering through their hair standing on end, would hide themselves behind a crack in the wall, so that they could see without being seen.

Jean and Alice scarcely noticed them; she was thinking only of how delightful was his tender care of her; while he was wondering how it was that rides in the open country could be such very charming things, and that a born sailor like himself could forget in a few weeks, and for no reason whatsoever, both comrades and ship. One morning, having lost their way, they wandered whither their steeds led them, amused as two children at their escapade, when they suddenly found their progress stopped by a brook with steep banks. It was not too wide to leap, and on the other side was a level piece of ground on which they could finish the game of hide and seek which they had been playing for an hour or more; but the banks were so worn by the dashing of the waters that they looked as if they would probably give way beneath their horses' feet if they did not spring very rapidly across; so Jean would not allow his wife to make the attempt. It was equally impossible to ford it;

the depth of the water forbade the very thought, so they stood looking at each other as if to ask what was best to be done. They had fallen from Scylla into Charybdis. To the right and left the undergrowth was so thick that it seemed impossible to make their way through, and to return the same way they came was out of the question.

"Oh! I know where we are," cried Jean suddenly. "About forty yards to the left is a ferry-boat; if we could only get as far as that. I cannot understand how I did not recognize the place before."

But to get to the ferry-boat was easier said than done, and after having tried to break a way with his horse through the branches Jean was obliged to give it up. The tips of the leaves tickled Samory's nostrils; the flexible branches struck him across the head and chest; he began to kick and rear so violently that Jean was obliged to drag his horse out, thinking himself lucky to get off without an accident.

Always prompt in deciding, the young officer got down, and, tying the two horses to the trunk of a tree, he determined to take his wife only across in the ferry-boat. When she should reach the other side, he would return, make the horses jump across, and, taking the highway, they would arrive at Kerdren within an hour. Alice tried to raise some objections. Could she not jump as well, or if there were any danger, why should they not both turn back? A forest without an outlet is unknown in such modern times as ours. But Jean insisted, and as she could not resist him, she threw her skirt over her arm, and decided to follow him.

"Give me your two hands," he said; "and lean against me." Then, walking backwards, he pushed his way with his broad shoulders through the undergrowth. In the way thus made by him, Alice had quite room enough to walk, protected as she was, and firmly supported by his two hands when her foot struck against a thorn. Obedient as a child, she shut her eyes and allowed herself to be guided by him with all the confidence of one. Whenever the branches grew very close together she instinctively bent her head and passed through easily. Notwithstanding these precautions, however, it so happened that her hat got caught in a branch; she continued to walk, thinking she could thus free it, but she did not succeed in doing so, and as the fork sprang back-

wards, it carried the hat and veil aloft as a trophy. She tried to reach upwards, laughing at the accident; but her husband's voice stopped her.

"Do not stir," he cried. "Your hair will be caught if you stand up. I have just come for it. Stoop a little lower."

She obeyed, and her head being no longer protected by her hat, was pressed against her husband's shoulder, and they continued to walk on. This time, however, Alice began to feel a strange emotion. It seemed that she could hear Jean's heart beating. The beating became louder every moment; and, seeing nothing else, isolated from everything and everybody by her fast-closed eyes, the beating of that heart came to her ear like a plain and distinct language, every word of which was full of tenderness. And during that time Jean felt that strange emotion more and more. His heart bounded at the thought of being necessary to her; it was delightful to think he was useful to Alice, and to feel he was taking this charming creature whither he would through the untrodden woods.

Her hair, somewhat tossed, and which threw a golden mist over her eyes, seemed more charming and precious than anything on earth, and he would not for the world have had anything happen to a single hair. A glimpse of the change within him passed through his mind, but while he was asking himself, strangely moved at the idea, what could be the cause of it, the wood ended and his wife raised her head, once more thanking him for his attention.

He gazed at her for a moment, rosy from the effect of that strange walk, as she arranged her hair mechanically. He stepped forward, and his lips moved, but he said nothing, and merely lifting her on the ferry-boat, he went back to where he had tied the horses in at least half the time he had taken to work his way through the forest.

Thousands of strange thoughts fomented within his brain, but their very novelty so dazzled and bewildered him that he could not believe one of them.

Springing first on one horse, then on the other, he made each in turn jump the brook. Then giving his wife her hat, he lifted her on her horse without saying a word, and during their return ride to Kerdren not half a dozen phrases were exchanged between them,

CHAPTER XV.

From that day onward, the young couple's manner was changed. The gay and easy intimacy which they had so enjoyed for a few days totally disappeared. Jean seemed as absent-minded as in the early days of their marriage, and resumed his very courteous but ceremonious manners; while she felt her timidity awake once more, and became again the frightened school-girl of the convent at Toulon.

Though she still played Chopin's impromptus and reveries, Jean began to walk every evening from one end to the other of the library, and his wife sorrowfully watched him, thinking he was home-sick for his beloved ocean and cherished career. How different things were on that morning the remembrance of which she cherished so fondly in her memory!

When she got home that day, she had thrown herself on her knees and thanked God. Could it be possible she had won his affection?

But, alas! by evening her hopes were shattered; her husband's preoccupation was caused, no doubt, by regret for his marriage, the regret which she always dreaded he would one day feel; and every morning she secretly resolved she would speak to him and ask him to resume the profession he so longed for. And yet nothing was further away from the young man's mind, and the thought which worried him was something far different from what Alice imagined.

From the strange emotions which had mastered him one morning, something, he knew not what, had arisen within him. Daily and hourly he asked himself what it could be, seeking every possible explanation of his thoughts before he would acknowledge to himself that all his trouble was caused by one little word.

He never dreamed it was possible that he could love the

child to whom he had one evening offered his hand, touched with pity because of her misfortunes. He thought her interesting, full of dignity, and of undeniable beauty; but never having allowed the complicated emotions to which love gives rise enter into his plan of existence, he had believed himself as well fortified against them as though they were something that could never be in his way; hence his intense astonishment.

Then, as he began to understand himself and realized how dear his young wife had become to him, seeing the profession that he so loved forgotten, his tastes and preferences of his former life—in a word, his whole life being changed by the effect of her power, while a sentiment he had never known had glided into his heart—he became timid for the first time in his life, fearful, as true love always makes one, and incapable of finding words to express what he felt. And yet at the same time he instinctively longed, as every lover does, to have his love returned. While she—he asked himself as soon as he had solved the riddle—could it be possible that she loved him?

Not being gifted with a particle of self-conceit he tormented himself and grew as anxious as a modest school-boy dreaming of a star above his reach. He forgot all the qualities he possessed which might attract a woman; he forgot the prestige of poetry, nobility, and distinterestedness which surrounded him when he offered his hand to Mademoiselle de Valvieux, and learning every day to value more and more the exquisite traits of character of his young wife, he was indignant with himself because he had not loved her from the first day, as Romeo did his Juliet. He dreamed and thought of the best way to attract her; and, lost between the future of his hopes and the present which he would have liked to have pushed back at least three months, he maintained the silence which Alice so wrongly understood.

Such was the state of things when one of the tenants of the De Kerdrens came to the chateau to announce his son's marriage, wanting also in a measure to have the young Count approve of his daughter-in-law, and to beg his landlord and his wife to honor him by their presence at the wedding.

The invitation was accepted to the delight of the peasants

who were still under the spell of Madame de Kerdren's radiant beauty, and were proud of their master's young wife. Besides that, Jean and Alice had sent a most useful and suitable present to the young couple, so the gratitude of the family was raised to the very highest pitch, and they were determined to pay every honor possible to Jean and his wife.

The wedding-guests stood together on the market-place to receive them, and the bell-ringer, as he began his peal of wedding-bells, looked out every now and then from between the shutters so as to be able to ring louder and louder when he saw them. A cortège of street urchins, beings sure to be present at every ceremony, looked on wonderingly, climbing the trees so that they might be able to see further up the road, calling out every moment some piece of news sure to be false, and making aloud the frankest remarks possible about every one present.

As soon as Alice arrived the bride was presented to her—a great, big girl, filled with emotion and blushing at the thought of her fine clothes, and whose eyes lit up when Alice complimented her.

As they stood near the young couple during the marriage service, Monsieur and Madame de Kerdren did not lose a single detail of the ceremony, and in the state of mind in which they both were, nothing was more likely to move them than such a sight. Notwithstanding the great difference of the surroundings, they put themselves in the place of the two young people standing before the altar, and saw themselves once more in the little chapel at Toulon, so brilliantly lit up, pledging themselves to each other for life. Jean recalled the thoughts which then filled his mind; he had felt very anxious, and as he heard behind him the glad voices of his comrades and the noise made by the rubbing of the gold fringe of their belts against the metal of the swords, a certain regret pierced his heart. He asked himself if it was still there; and he found himself no longer the same man. It seemed to him that he had recently become the owner of a new heart and a new head, and he had not learned to use them without a certain degree of awkwardness and astonishment, though he was charmed at the discoveries he made at every step.

What was his wife thinking about? he mused, as he

watched her standing, her prayer-book clasped tightly in her hands, and her eyes lowered in what seemed a reverie rather than a prayer. In the softened light that filled the sanctuary she seemed to him to be surrounded with an exquisite and mysterious charm, and he longed to take her by the hand before the priest and say:

"Perform the marriage ceremony over us once more, I entreat you; when first I answered to the question, was that the woman of my choice, my head and my will alone responded. Now I wish to repeat it with a loving and ardent heart."

The thoughts which preoccupied Alice, and which her husband longed to read, were much the same. When the rector's sermon, spoken in Breton, was ended, which had seemed to Alice like some magical incantation, rings were exchanged between the pair. The one who was most touched was the groom, most assuredly, and his big, honest, rough hand, when he drew off the white glove, in which it was thought the correct thing to imprison it, was seen to tremble, and his voice quivered as he answered the rector. On the other hand Alice saw her own personality in the confiding and happy look that the young girl wore as she promised her whole life away, and she smiled as she thought of the past. But the vision of the grave naval officer who stood beside her on her own wedding-day, so calm and so composed, contrasted vividly with the happiness beaming on the face of the young peasant; and all unknowingly she sighed when he turned towards his bride, looking at her with a radiant glance, unable to restrain his joy until they left the church.

When the wedding-party stepped outside the church, and Jean, as became the lord of the manor, first kissed the bride, all the guests followed his example; and it was only the remembrance of a good repast which awaited them that stopped such loving congratulations. According to the custom of the country, every one present had sent some kind of provisions the day before—fowl, meat or vegetables; and the giant Pantagrue might have been content to seat himself at that table, laid in a barn and decked with greenery.

Seated at the upper end, Madame de Kerdren tried as well as she could to emulate the almost fabulous exploits of her

neighbors in the way of eating both on the right and left-hand sides.

It seemed to her that she was present at one of those wondrous repasts chronicled by Homer, and that she saw his heroes divide up the ox which they had just sacrificed to the gods, before putting on their helmets to engage in new warlike exploits.

Soon, however, Jean observed that new as the sight was to Alice, she was beginning to look weary, when the violin-players, who also took part in the banquet, drew their instruments from under the table, taking them out of the colored handkerchiefs in which they were rolled.

Half an hour later the ball was in full swing, and Alice, not sorry to escape from the air over-burdened with odors, followed the bride's mother, delighted to pay a visit to the little house of the young couple, to see the furniture that was altogether new, and the trousseau which was arranged in the great cupboard of black oak.

Alice followed her, interested in everything and admiring in all sincerity the farm-yard and stables; yet over-burdened with a sadness for which she could not account, and which sank into her very heart. She thought of Jean and wished that he was but a simple peasant, like the groom of to-day, and she a humble farmer's wife, but on the condition that she might read in his eyes the same expression of tenderness which she had seen in the eyes of the village youth at church. She thought this nest with its earthen floor would be all-sufficient to shelter her happiness, if she could only obtain what her heart called for, and, improbable as that might appear, she felt a feeling of envy as she visited that little kingdom of home.

When they came out of the house, it was night, and Jean was walking near by, smoking a cigar. He threw it away and walked quickly towards his wife, whom he had come to take home, yet did not wish to disturb her, he told her.

She took the arm he offered her, and began to tell him with evident enjoyment about all she had just seen—charming the farmer's wife, who was walking beside her, added to which the young Count's praises fairly overwhelmed her with joy. They soon arrived at the barn, and there liveliness was at its height, and they were dancing with more ardor than ever.

Little by little, the couples scattered, deserting the overheated room for the big court-yard which had been well swept, and even for a neighboring meadow. The full moon lit up gaily the rounds and quadrilles, and joy was at its highest pitch. From time to time a tuft of grass in the field would trip up a dancer; or a young hen, awakened by all this noise, would fly into the middle of some group, her head thrown out, frightened out of her wits. Then shouts of laughter began which seemed never-ending, and after a hard chase the poor hen was caught and imprisoned again in her coop, mad with fear and half dead.

Still leaning on her husband's arm, Alice looked on, amusing herself at the variety of this sight, when the violins began a waltz.

"Do you know," said Jean suddenly, coming towards her, "we have never yet danced together, you and I?"

"That is true," she replied with a faint smile; "not even at Madame de Semiane's."

"Will you make up to me for it now?" he answered quickly, scarcely giving her time to finish her sentence.

At the same time she felt him slip his arm round her waist, and she felt herself drawn into the dance in exquisitely measured rhythm. The young officer waltzed charmingly, and in the somewhat deserted corner whither he had led his wife, fearing that any one should knock against her, he was at full liberty to turn and twist.

She allowed herself to be guided by him, he taking her now to the right, and now to the left, with a movement as capricious and sudden as the flight of a bird, while she leaned on him with half-closed eyes.

Her tiny feet scarcely touched the ground, and never before had she felt such a sensation whilst dancing. The fresh evening breeze which caressed her temples in place of the close air of a drawing-room; the gentle moonlight, in which the couples turning round seemed like fantastic ghosts, gave an air of strange poetry to the scene. It seemed as though she were verging towards something unforeseen, but which would make a mark in her existence, and her husband's face, now lit up, and now re-entering brusquely into shadow-land, appeared to her full of mystery.

"How well you waltz," he said, suddenly bending forward

a little. "It seems to me I am holding a sylph in my arms. Are you sure you do not come here on the stroke of midnight every evening to dance on the tops of the blades of grass, and are you not about to disappear in this silvery moonbeam?"

She smiled at him without answering, and they continued.

"I should so much like—" said Jean at the end of a moment, but the violins suddenly stopped, and he as suddenly kept silence.

Somewhat out of breath and dizzy, Alice stood still, leaning on his arm. He trembled, she thought, and the absolute silence which he kept seemed to hurt her. Just then the carriage which came for them from De Kerdren appeared on the road; and the noise of the horses, joined to the light of the carriage lamps, seemed to draw Jean out of a dreamy fit of musing. He started, and began to excuse himself:

"I am mad," he cried. "You will take cold." And, running to the carriage, he wrapped her up in an immense fur cloak.

"You are really packing me up," she said, laughing as she was accustomed to do when she was afraid that her gratitude would betray her feelings. "The night is delightful."

"Delicious," returned Jean; "and if I were not afraid of the roads being too damp for you, I would propose—"

"To return on foot," she answered quickly, interrupting him; "oh! with all my heart."

And he stopped, looking now at the ground, now at his wife's shoes.

"I have strong boots," she returned, guessing his thought; "I can assure you." And she showed her tiny feet with a look of profound conviction.

He hesitated a moment, looking towards the road that led home which was shaded with twisted oaks, where the light only shone through here and there; then, with the quick movement of one who takes a sudden resolution—

"Come," he said, offering his arm. Then speaking to the footman as he passed him by, he sent the carriage home, and quickly, as if he were afraid of changing his decision, he took his young wife away with him.

CHAPTER XVI.

To avoid the loud and effusive good-byes which the villagers in the midst of their gaiety would be sure to give them, and for fear of attracting the attention of the last couples who were dancing in the fields, they walked as lightly as possible, thus giving their departure a certain air of flight and evasion which amused them, and up to the moment they gained the pathway their only thought was to avoid the pebbles which might have made too much noise beneath their feet.

The moment they were beneath the trees, however, away from all chance of disturbance, their animation left them, and they suddenly became silent. It was darker here than it had seemed in the distance, and it was somewhat difficult to get through the arch of verdure. From time to time the moonbeams shone through some opening like a ray of electric light, but ten yards farther on it was a waning moon, and not enough remained of its sparkling light to bespangle a fan. This continual game of light and shade troubled the young woman without her knowing why. It seemed as though an enormous lantern walked before her, turning suddenly every now and then to scrutinize her face at the moment she least expected it. Too much brilliancy troubled her, the night made a still more vivid impression upon her, and she was silent because she could find nothing to say. It so happened that the young officer was just as silent. It may be that the same causes produced the same effect upon him as upon Madame de Kerdren; it may be that the calm beauty of the night absorbed all his attention. Whatever it was, he moved on without saying a word.

The smell of wild violets and primroses, sweet and discreetly confidential, rose to their nostrils; while glow-worms

shone in the brush that bordered the way. It was peaceful and poetic as an idyll, and the charming couple that wandered along these enchanted groves seemed the natural heroes. Still they were silent, and the agony of the situation began to weigh so heavily on the young wife that she longed for a word—only one, however insignificant it might be, provided it broke the strained situation; yet she was frightened at the very thought of her own voice breaking the silence.

"I am going to tell you a story," said Jean suddenly, stopping and taking hold of both her hands, as though to emphasize his words. "Or rather, no—" he continued, when she turned her candid eyes towards him, in which the most intense astonishment could plainly be read,—“let us not talk of fiction and allegories; you are the only fairy here; you are the only one in my thoughts and dreams: let us speak of you alone.”

And suddenly, with that ardor and dash which were almost violent in him, he began to tell the story of those last weeks, describing all he had felt, and showing the mysterious workings of his heart which had been brought from the somewhat indifferent sympathy of those early days to this cry of love which now escaped him, vibrating with life.

Passing lightly over the beginning, he dwelt at length on the present time, telling in exquisite fashion his love for her, and what charm he found in her. She listened with a beating heart, touched and overcome by the accents of sincerity in which he told his tale, and yet so surprised that the true sense of his words was slow to make its way through her brain. She would have to hear her name repeated by her husband in order to be very sure that he was not talking about some one of those heroines of whom he used to read her the history, or that it was not one of those dreams which she often builded within her heart.

But this time it was really she of whom he spoke, and the noise of a turned leaf would no longer have dispelled her sweet illusions. The innate poetry in Jean's disposition, added to the sentiments that touched him so vividly, gave his language a true eloquence that carried all before it, and never had Alice felt herself so beautiful, however flattering

was the mirror she stood before, as she was now painted by his enthusiastic words, so full of youth and passion.

"He sees me in a mirage," she thought confusedly, as she listened to him. But as it was the enchanted mirage of tenderness, she felt touched to the very heart.

And yet she had not strength to say a single word; she could not even smile or make the slightest movement, and Jean, struck by the impassible expression of her face, felt his courage fail him. His coolness and easiness of manner deserted him, and, intimidated, perhaps for the first time in his life, he felt as though his bravery would desert him in the presence of his young wife for whose sake he had already forgotten his career, his predilections, and the ideas which had governed him up till then. His voice quivered with emotion, and he hastened to finish while he still possessed mastery over himself.

"All that I have said," he repeated, speaking as rapidly as possible and drawing Alice closer to him, "was not merely to tell you what I think, but because I want you to know that I adore you, and that my most bitter regret is not to have known sooner how adorable you are. I do not know how long I may live, but these two months of lost happiness will ever be a source of regret to me. I have neglected to live during these two months and I long to seize hold once more of every hour, every minute of them, and to employ them to win your affection. Little by little I would like to go back to the first day I knew you, and to make you happy with all that power of giving happiness which I feel within myself to-day. The key to Paradise is within my hands; I have failed to open it, and my bitter regret is that I had to tell you all that I felt."

"In that case," returned Alice in such a soft whisper that her husband could scarcely hear her, "do not regret anything, for one of us, at least, has lived in your Paradise for the past two months."

"Alice!" cried the young officer.

"Yes, it is true;" she murmured softly, bending her head.

A little later they started again on their way homeward. They smelt the same odor of violets which this time seemed like the fragrant expression of their thoughts, and rose to

their nostrils like the incense of a feast. When the flitting moonbeams allowed them to look into each other's faces, they smiled at each other; and where the branches grew so thick that they were again in comparative darkness, they whispered softly to each other, fearing no doubt to disturb the spirits of the woods who were sleeping close by. Just as they arrived at the little door of the park at Kerdren, a nightingale began his wonderful song. He must have been very close by for they distinctly heard every one of his delicate trills, while the exquisite tenderness of the melody pierced them to the soul.

The bird seemed to sing for his own pleasure, like a famous musician lulling himself to sleep with the music he best loves; for his song was sweet rather than brilliant, and it was hard to believe that such thrilling notes were not given forth by some thoughtful, suffering human soul—there was so much depth and sentiment in their modifications. In the absolute stillness his voice resounded with a marvelous clearness and purity, and the young couple stopped, struck with admiration, and scarcely daring to rest their feet on the ground for fear of disturbing some creaking branch that might betray them.

"Listen!" said Jean, after a moment in a whisper. "It is our song of welcome." Then pressing his wife closer to him he added: "And it is not like Romeo, weeping when he heard the song of the lark ushering in the morning; we, on the contrary, have love, youth and a whole life before us; we can salute our bird with delight, for he does not sing to usher in the dawn of the morning but that of a never-ending happiness."

CHAPTER XVII.

It was now early in July, and the six weeks which had elapsed since the young pair had avowed their mutual affection had passed with the swiftness of lightning. As Jean had said, truly it was a paradise on earth to be young, to love each other, and to think when each evening came that the next day would bring the same intense happiness, only adding to it the memory of one more blissful day. Jean and Alice delighted in their Eden, exploring, as it were, every one of its enchanted corners, and never tiring of finding hidden beneath everything the same two words, "him" and "her."

In the bliss of their happiness they had told each other everything and learned to know one another. Jean marvelled at all the delicate feelings that can be contained in a woman's heart, at her enjoyment in everything, and her somewhat mischievous gaiety of which certainly no one, at first, would have suspected Mademoiselle de Valvieux. He enjoyed for the first time that sentiment of having some one to look to him for protection and support which is as sweet to give as to receive; and he was delighted at the way his wife used to look up at him when she would say: "Would you like, Jean?"

To hear her say those few words Jean would have given the entire universe had he possessed it; and he, who thought his love had reached the highest point, felt that it grew greater every day. Jealous that Alice should have an entire half of his life, not only in the present and future, but also in the past, he told her again and again those memories of his youth and childhood for which she had so often pined; and he related to her everything he remembered, whether joys or sorrows.

He described to her the years he had passed at Kerdren when the only thing which enlivened the castle was his boy-

ish mischief; when his guardian used to retire into the library, leaving the child to grow as he would. He loved his home, around which he used to romp every evening, as if to make sure that nothing had been changed during the day; and his delight was great when he found his way into some fishing-boat, half by coaxing, half by imperiousness, for the sailors did not like to have the responsibility of having the young Count on board during bad weather; and he was sometimes obliged to hide himself beneath a heap of ropes or nets where he lay concealed until the boat had started. The captain would then pretend to be very angry, and threaten to go back with him to land, but he never did it, and even while he scolded he would clear a place on one of the benches and spread an old sail for the child to sit down.

Then standing up, holding their woolen caps in their hands, all the men would recite that touching prayer of the Breton peasant: "Almighty God, protect us, for our boat is small, and the sea so vast."

Then every one would begin his work, and no one thought of anything save sardines till evening.

Then he would tell about the vague dreams of his youth, and his long conversations with the sea, to which loved companion he would confide all his dreams of the future.

In her turn, Alice would talk about herself, but her reminiscences were shorter and too mixed up with the memory of her recent loss not to be somewhat sad, so her husband would not allow her to dwell very long on them. Like true lovers, as they were, Alice and Jean so fitted into each other's lives that, according to the charming expression of the poet, "Their horizon extended as far as their own shadows," and they became, if possible, still more isolated from the world than they had been at the beginning of their marriage. The invitation they had resolved to send Madame de Semiane was indefinitely postponed, and if Alice spoke about it to her husband, he would reply:

"It is too hot now; let us wait till autumn."

And then, as they had decided during the spring to put it off until summer, they would both begin to laugh, and nothing more would be said.

Every one in the village had grown accustomed to see

them always together, and the young couple were greeted with general sympathy. The matrons would look after them with a knowing smile, the girls with a look of envy, and many a one, as she led her cows to pasture, would be dreamy the whole day long, thinking of that happiness so plainly to be seen, so youthful and so beautiful.

Jean felt sure he would get one month's holiday, at least, and he would project trips that would take at least a year to accomplish, while every day he would propose some new place.

"But why should we go away?" his wife would say; "everything is so pleasant here. Have you already become tired of Kerdren?"

"But your life here is too monotonous," he would answer; "as for me, to love you in Brittany or to love you in Scotland is just as sweet in one place as the other."

One day, towards the middle of the afternoon, the sky, which had been cloudy since morning, became covered with heavy clouds; the sun disappeared and the atmosphere became so heavy that it was impossible to remain indoors. For the previous week storm had succeeded storm without interruption, and this one threatened to be of unusual violence.

Unable to do anything, Alice walked up and down her room; it seemed to her that something was threatening her, and that the storm was about to burst in all its fury over her. She longed for it to come at once; her waiting seemed to enervate her, and she gave a sigh of relief when she saw the first flash of lightning. A violent storm of wind and rain then began, covering the park with so thick a whirlwind that it was impossible to see more than ten yards from the window. The leaves, blown from the trees together with the rain before they had time to reach the ground, were madly whirled around and around, and one could hear the noise of the great branches of the trees as they snapped off and fell, breaking the shrubs beneath. Clap after clap of thunder came one after another, rolling away in what seemed never-ending depths, and Madame de Kerdren, who had drawn near the window to enjoy the beauty of the spectacle, often put her hands to her ears, half-deafened by the noise. The roars of the sea could be heard from the castle; thus in the sudden

darkness which covered the earth, these two terrible voices answering one another, seemed to announce the destruction of all things which surrounded them. Gradually light returned; the thunder rolled further and further away and the rain began to fall more gently. Still, the wind remained just as strong as ever, and Alice was scarcely able to hold the window she had opened to let in a little air. The trees bent backwards and forwards, and their well-washed leaves of a brilliant green seemed to expand with delight beneath the life-giving rain; while the air had that peculiar odor which follows a summer shower, and which brings out of plants, crevices, and stones that had been previously overheated by the intense warmth, a perfume of rest and well-being, as it were, that calms and appeases every ill.

One by one, the doors and the windows were thrown open. Every living thing feeling the need of the open air, men and maid-servants, as well as all the animals belonging to the farm-yard, came out to enjoy the freshness. A few drops moistened Alice's brow as she leaned her head against the sash of sculptured stone, yielding to the charm of this exquisite moment. The sea would, no doubt, be magnificent just then, and, looking for something to throw over her shoulders, knowing it would be impossible to hold an umbrella open, she had finished preparing for her trip to the strand when she was stopped by an unusual noise. It seemed like the roar of the waters, and yet the sound of the waves could be heard very distinctly close beside it. As astonished as she was, the servants in the yard raised their heads, and she saw them confer with each other pointing toward the village. Some of them walked towards the avenue, when suddenly a red light appeared to the left, and as if bad news had been borne by the flames, the vague murmurs which Alice had remarked were changed into loud screams. A little boy from the village came hurrying up the avenue, running with all his might, evidently the bearer of bad news, and when Alice, who immediately on seeing him had gone down stairs, put her foot on the first step of the terrace, he ran into the yard. She made him a sign to keep quiet for a moment or two to get his breath before he spoke, and then, turning to the servant, said:

"Get out the pump," she ordered. "Yves, go and saddle a horse and ride off for your master; everybody else must come to the rescue."

While her orders were being executed she questioned the child. A barn had been set on fire by the lightning, and on account of the violence of the wind the whole village was threatened. Unable to remain where she was at the thought of what was happening so near her, Alice went on in front with the little boy, and she started with a rapid step over the damp ground on which she slipped every moment. Great ruts had been made in the avenue, and rivulets full of earth and pebbles flowed on either side.

The rain had ceased almost completely, but the wind was as strong as ever, and the fire, impelled by its fury, became every moment stronger and stronger. The flames twisted round, rose, crept downwards and flared across the adjoining roofs, all of which were thatched, and it was a marvel they did not all take fire at once. Nothing had been done to stay the progress of the fire by the disorganized and tumultuous group of villagers that surrounded the barn when Alice arrived, preceded by her guide, her hair wet and the lace scarf with which she had covered her head falling on her shoulders. Her presence stirred up the crowd; they moved aside to make room for her, and those who stood in front murmured: "It's Madame." At the same time they put their hands to their hats, but she made a sign for them to stop.

"No, no," she said quickly, thinking they were doing something to stop the fire. By that time she stood in the centre of the group and, seeing that they were doing nothing—

"Are you going to allow the whole village to burn up?" she cried, indignant at their supineness.

And as the owner of the barn turned towards her with despair in his eyes, and saluted mechanically—

"My poor friend," she said more gently, holding out her little hand to him, "it is terrible, but we must save all that remains. I have come to help you."

He drew near her, but his discouragement was so great that, though she spoke to him, she turned towards the other men. All they needed was some one to direct, for they had

any amount of good-will. Alice spoke clearly and with a tone of authority nearly equal to that her husband would have employed, and made every one do their duty with a firmness which admitted of no bolting. In less than a quarter of an hour a double chain was organized, going from one end of the fire to a neighboring pond. A group of fishermen, returning from mooring their boats higher up, so as to avoid the tide which threatened to be unusually high, had joined to the workers.

More accustomed to fight off danger with coolness, and also more accustomed to obey, they were a wonderful help to Madame de Kerdren. Without a word or a gesture, they acted in concert, and thanks to such vigorous help, it was more than likely that if the houses in the immediate vicinity could not be saved, at least the neighboring ones would be, over which water was being poured without stint.

With admirable courage and decisive qualities it was difficult to imagine to be concealed beneath her habitual gentle reserve, Alice saw to everything. Now she took from the chain some arm which had grown tired, then again she showed one of the men who stood at the end some place which was actively threatened by the flames. Altogether unconscious of danger, she sometimes drew so near that the smoke wrapped her round like a mantle, and the sailors remarked among themselves as they heard the measured tones of her voice, encouraging and directing the workers in the midst of the terrific noise:

"She is like the captain on his quarter-deck during a tempest."

At the end of about three hours the task was accomplished. The fire had destroyed the very last mite of all that had to be abandoned to its mercies, while the houses surrounding it were protected, and so thoroughly wet that they seemed out of danger. Just then a horse galloping was heard, and Samory with loosened rein appeared on the turn of the road. About two hundred yards behind rode the servant who had been sent for his master, his horse being unable to keep up the speed of Jean's, and the two animals, white with foam, were literally trembling with fatigue and fright.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The moment Jean sprang from his horse he looked round for his wife. As he saw her a short distance away he gave a deep sigh of relief and smiled at her. Then as he drew near, he asked briefly the causes of the accident, if the inhabitants were safe, and what precautions had been taken. The name of Madame de Kerdren was re-echoed on all sides with such lively expressions of gratitude and praise that it made Jean smile proudly.

"She had had the pump brought, she had organized the chain, she had directed and ordered what was to be done, standing in the midst of them like the humblest amongst them; and certainly it was thanks to her that so much had been saved." As they related all this, the magnitude of what she had done suddenly burst upon them and spurred them to wildest enthusiasm. The fragile appearance of the young woman enhanced the effect produced by her heroism, and rousing their admiration to the highest pitch, they surrounded and cheered her.

Nothing spreads more rapidly than a passionate movement through an over-excited crowd already touched by recent emotion, and their enthusiasm caught them like wild-fire. As they abandoned their posts and their work, they flocked round her, trying to take her hands, kiss her dress, to carry her in triumph to the castle.

Touched and yet troubled Alice let them do as they would; tears filled her eyes, and she saw as in a mist the rough faces which bent before her, thanking "our lady" with almost pious adoration. The women kissed and pushed their children towards her. One would have said that it was an assemblage of ship-wrecked mariners who found themselves once more on land after hours of anguish. And as Jean

with a beating heart made his way through the crowd to join her and kiss her hands—

"Stop, I beg of you," she said, laughingly, as she drew back, "I am wet as though I had just come out of the river."

He then remarked, for the first time, the state she was in, and his emotion was quickly changed to fright. From head to foot she showed the marks of the work she had done for the past few hours. Her hair, almost in absolute disorder, clung to her forehead; the thin waist of her summer dress was stuck to her shoulders in great wet patches, while her feet which were actually dripping with water, sank into the yellow mud of the street. Now that she stood still, the reaction of the tremendous efforts she had been making set in; she began to tremble and her cheeks became covered with bluish patches.

Jean was in despair, and being utterly unable to bring her immediate relief put him almost beside himself. All the houses of the village were deserted; through the open doors both the rain and the rivulets formed by the storm had had free passage, and the earthen floors were wet through and through.

In a barn that stood a little to one side a low and unusually long roof had kept the floor comparatively dry. It was raining again, and it was so tiresome to walk on the muddy and sticky ground that, notwithstanding the comparative comfortlessness of the place, it helped her wonderfully to feel herself on dry ground. She found her voice once more and wished to speak; but Jean would not allow her. Filled with anxiety, he unbuttoned his cloak and wrapped it round her shoulders repeating:

"It is a shame. Great heavens! in what a state you are. How could you have been so imprudent, and how is it that not one of these people ever thought of preventing you?"

He then grew angry and threw flaming glances of resentment at his servants, putting all the blame on them, despite the expostulations of his wife.

She could not allow those poor people to remain without help, and how could Jean imagine that they, half-crazed

as they were, would have obeyed any one else as they had her? But he would listen to nothing, growing indignant as he felt his blood boiling in his veins, and saw Alice shivering while he was unable to bestow on her any of his own warmth. The servant he had told to go and fetch the carriage showed him in the distance a horseman who had already started, answering:

"He has gone for it, sir."

And he excused himself by signs for not being able to offer his coat to cover his mistress, for it was wet through and through. There was no fire in any part of the village, and the houses that had not been played upon by the pump were too far away to make it worth while to go there through the rain and wind-storm, so all they could do was to wait; but waiting is by far more tiresome than attempting to do something, however difficult, and Jean, unable to keep still, trembled with impatience and anxiety.

He made Alice sit down on some bundles of straw they had found at one end, and, kneeling beside her so as to be able to look into her face, he watched with flaming eyes the exhaustion shown on every line of her delicate face.

At last the rumble of wheels was heard, and they could see the carriage galloping along, and splattered to the very top by the mud which the horses splashed up at every step. It seemed to Jean that a mountain was taken off his heart, and that the half hour he had just passed was at least ten years long. Without losing a minute he took Alice in his arms and lifted her right on to the cushions.

There he formed a regular heap of furs brought by a maid who had come to help her mistress; so when Alice arrived at the castle, she was so wrapped up that her face could scarcely be seen.

A big fire burned in her room, lit by the servants who had already returned home, and every affectionate care was given her. Notwithstanding all this, however, the shivering continued, and she trembled so violently that while she was drinking the cup of hot tea brought her in her bed her teeth knocked against the china.

At the end of half an hour, however, the blood flowed back into her cheeks, and passing suddenly from extreme

cold to a heat that was absolutely insupportable, the perspiration began to pour from her forehead. She wished to get up, saying she was completely recovered, but Jean opposed her peremptorily.

It was easy to see that she had all the symptoms of a violent fever, but her hands were dry and hard, notwithstanding the moisture of her temples, while her pulse was of the quickest. In any case, she had been so tired that she had well earned the right to lie down for the rest of the day, and night was not very far off. The doctor was spoken of, but she had called out indignantly:

"Why, he would take you for children."

So Jean yielded, though his anxiety and agony of mind were only too evident, and his agitation kept him in a state of perpetual turmoil. Every moment he asked her how she felt.

"Just as one feels after a pleasant cold bath," she answered gaily. And then, unable to get rid of his anxiety:

"I would rather you had ten of them than to have three hours in that bitter wind, with that wet dress on; it would be a far milder test," he continued.

About eight o'clock Alice grew calmer; the idea of the doctor was definitely given up, and she got her husband to change his clothes and to take some little care of himself. It was rumored throughout the village that Madame de Kerdren had returned home sick to the castle; and soon before the door were ranged a number of anxious faces whose owners came to inquire for her.

The young Count went down for a moment to talk to them of the precautions which prudence obliged them to take if any of the embers of the fire still remained, as well as to thank them for having come; and he had found such consolation in this assemblage of men and women moved by affection only, and sharing with so much sincerity the anxiety which tortured him that he became quite relieved. At the same time his confiding smile alone produced more effect than all the answers of the servants, and every man there felt inclined to throw his cap in the air.

The next day Alice was in her usual state of health, except for a slight hoarseness which was very natural, and which

did not prevent her from resuming her ordinary everyday habits.

Her husband, who had been far more anxious, did not get over it so quickly; it seemed to him that a particularly painful impression remained to him from that day, and it was long before he forgot it.

Neither did they forget it very soon in the village, but for very different reasons; and the affection which Alice had inspired was now changed into absolute adoration. The naïve gratitude of the children showed itself in a thousand ways, and they brought everything to the castle they could imagine would please Madame de Kerdren—bundles of field-flowers and wild strawberries from the wood.

CHAPTER XIX.

Three weeks had passed. All their plans for making long tours were now set aside and changed into a short trip into the different parts of Brittany which Alice had never seen, and, short as had been their absence, the young couple had felt the charm of home on their return, and were overjoyed more than they knew.

There is a pleasure in the return home which is like none other, and which is all the more powerful as the emotions and happiness felt there have been greater or less. The souvenirs which linger there are like friends which welcome one, and a real joy is felt in the familiarity with little things which allows one to place one's hands at once and take up anywhere and everywhere the object one wants.

How much more vivid this impression must be when this return is after the first absence and when the house to which they return is still a lover's nest. That is what the young people might have said, as they passed their threshold, one leaning against the other, and both equally happy.

"We will remain here now, will we not?" asked Alice a little later during the evening when they were walking in the park.

"Always," returned Jean smiling; "always under the same oak, and our great-great-grandchildren may find us seated there like Philemon and Baucis!—"

And while they were awaiting this mythological crown of their mutual love, Philemon and Baucis resumed their rides through the country.

The young officer's holidays were drawing near their close, and they had made arrangements one day to visit the ancient monastery situated a few leagues from De Kerdren, remarkable both on account of its architecture and its site. Altogether deserted, it seemed an eagle's nest perched on the top of a rock, its stones loosening every day more

and more on account of the powerful roots of the young shrubs and plants that grew through its walls. All the winds of heaven had full liberty to roam there; and the front exposed to the north and to the sea breeze was eaten away and covered with a kind of white deposit like a leprosy.

Aside from that, in the court-yard of the interior whole galleries remained, and marvels of sculpture were to be found which people might come long distances to see in a museum, but which the indifference of the public here left to oblivion. On the ground floor were also to be found fragments of mural pictures, heads of angels, rays of glory from which had disappeared the figure of the saint, and the symbolical lily, held by a hand whose right wrist had disappeared in the mist.

For more than an hour the young couple had wandered there without tiring. The sun was on the point of setting. They allowed themselves to linger until they could not have arrived at Kerdren till late in the evening. They repeated this to each other and yet they could not tear themselves away, forgetting themselves on this last day of their vacation, like school-children. It seemed to them that never again would there be so charming a morrow, and, allowing the horses harnessed to the carriage to neigh with impatience, they began again their undecided wanderings.

Nothing is more captivating than things which speak to us of olden times, on which so many thousands of eyes have gazed before ours—over which so many years have rolled, and within which so many events have taken place. Antique monuments of this kind have a peculiar attraction for some people, above all for those minds that love to dwell in poetic fancies.

Beneath the arches of the cloister the shadows became dim and mystical; the only patches of color were the stones clothed with green moss, whilst in the midst of the high grass which grew in the court-yard the statues belonging to some of the tombs which were still erect stood out like phantoms.

"If we climb up quickly," said Jean to his wife, "we will get there in time to see the sun setting in the sea. What do you say?"

And he pointed to a belfry tower which time had merci-

fully spared, round which ran winding stairs, still white and looking almost new. She followed him, throwing the train of her riding habit over her arm, and urging him on when he stayed too long testing the solidity of a step or of a landing before he would allow her to try them.

They gained the top in a very few minutes, and just as they stepped on the platform the first rays of the setting sun were reflected in the water. The sea, smooth as a lake, was of a deep green as far as the eye could reach, and as rapidly as though it were falling the sun seemed to sink into the ocean. The lower rays disappeared, extinguished as suddenly as a lamp plunged in water, in which the globe is half immersed. Through the light clouds which appeared in the depths of the horizon, gloriously magnificent pieces of color rose to the very middle of the sky; and as the sun sank down, a broad band of reddish rays appeared, brilliant as the flames of a great fire, and the shade became gradually fainter and fainter until they melted into tones of the most exquisite blue.

The spectacle was magnificent; it was impossible to imagine a better place to see it in all its grandeur and loveliness, and yet the young officer did not even seem to be conscious of it.

With his back turned to the setting sun, and with frowning and with anxious eyes, he scrutinized his wife's face and her every movement with pained and anxious attention, whilst she, leaning against the light arches which ran round the platform, was in ecstasy at all she saw. She had thrown the train of her riding-habit from her arm and its heavy folds swept the white dust of the stones; but her pose, at once so easy and so calm, intensified the effect of her quick and almost painful breathing. It was short and nervous as though it was an agony to breathe; and every now and then, when a breeze stronger than usual swept over the tower, she would give a little cough. She herself seemed unconscious of this, and her eyes sparkled with admiration.

"How beautiful it is," she said after a moment's pause, turning towards her husband with all that enthusiastic warmth he so loved in her; "it carries one away, does it not?"

"Yes," he returned in an absent-minded way; "but you came up too fast," he continued, following out his thought.

"Where?" she answered in astonishment; "into the clouds?"

"No, no," said Jean, who could not help smiling; "here, just now. You were all out of breath, and you are still."

"Do not believe it," she returned in the tone of one who tries to persuade herself she has no reason to be anxious; "the stairs had nothing to do with that; I have had a kind of oppression on the chest ever since the fire, which resembles a cold on account of the slight cough which you hear."

"Since the fire?" said Jean quickly; "how is it that I never remarked it, and why have you said nothing to me about it?"

She, however, did not appear to think much of his anxiety, and answered carelessly:

"It was not worth while. I only feel it in the morning or evening, or in an air somewhat more bracing than usual, like in this one."

Then, as her husband wished her to go down at once, she said: "Stay a moment longer," as they reached the threshold of the door.

He stopped, his eyes fixed, not on the horizon, but on the face of the young woman whose radiant smile went to his heart; the crimson light which still glanced athwart the sky surrounded her with a brilliant glory, disappearing as she went down into the yawning opening of the stair-case. They felt a strange sensation as they passed brusquely from all that brilliant light to the comparative night of the stair-case, and it took some time for them to become accustomed to that darkness in which there was something so sad. The cold air peculiar to all old buildings laden with melancholy, and seemingly as old by as many centuries as the stones through which it blows, blew against one's shoulders with such strength that it seemed a tangible thing that could be held in one's hand, and Alice began again to cough in a nervous way. Suddenly a thought, the anguish of which it was impossible to express, pierced the young man's heart like a flash of lightning, resuming in one single word the

vague anxieties of several weeks and of the present moment. Such was his horror that he actually felt a bodily pain pierce his heart, and a perspiration cold as ice stood on his brow. It was as if a phantom rose from those ancient stones to call out that terrible word, and that henceforward it would forever ring in his ears.

Seized with a terror than was totally foreign to his nature, he involuntarily hastened his footsteps, dragging his wife with him, unable to find anything but words devoid of sense to answer what she said, and longing to be once more in the daylight with an ardor that was almost agonizing.

As soon as he put his foot in the court-yard he gave a long sigh; and, just as he had done on the tower, he scrutinized Alice's face with an eager eye as she came out. Never had her cheeks been so rosy; her eyes sparkled, and the ungloved hand which he held in his own was fresh and supple.

He sighed once more still more deeply, but this time like a man from whose mind an immense weight has been taken; but when he came to the end of the avenue he turned round on his saddle, and stopped as though he could not help himself, as if he longed to draw an answer from that sculptured belfry in which so terrible a voice had spoken to him.

The next day he had an unexpected surprise. One of his comrades from the "Naïad," who had been promoted at the same time as he, had been obliged to come to Lorient for forty-eight hours, and as soon as his business was over, he asked the way to Kerdren, and arrived there about four o'clock.

"You must stay with us," said Jean as he welcomed him. And as the young lieutenant explained that his holiday was only till the evening of the next day, "A day and a half is worth something," insisted the young Count; "and I shall be charmed to see you."

His comrade was only too glad to accept, and Madame de Kerdren's welcome had been so gracious, not overwhelming her guest with attentions, and yet forestalling his every wish, that at the end of two hours the visitor declared that he would like to stay at Kerdren for the remainder of his days.

Alice urged him to talk, asking him so many questions

about the doings on board the "Naïad" for the past six months and showing that she was not only familiar with the life on board ship, but also with the names and dispositions of all her husband's comrades, that the lieutenant was quite astonished. He had not expected, either for himself or his friends, such affectionate interest, and the frank, simple cordiality shown him by so pretty a woman went straight to his heart.

In place of the somewhat absorbed, absent-minded comrade he expected to find, thinking of nothing save the joys of love, he saw himself welcomed by two friends, one of them so gracious and sympathetic that she reminded him of the verses of the poet, so much so that he repeated them to himself that evening when he went to bed—

"Be thou sweet or grave, tender or severe,
Friendship was my best, my fondest love;
Let whose't will be the hand that holds me dear,
I'll cherish it fond, like a fond sweet dove.
No, never! no, never, shall I push away
The emblem of a sentiment fair,
But when the hand is still fairer,—ah! say,
I'll press it still closer there."

And the young lieutenant also found a charm in this hand still fairer, in this amiability still more delicate, which yet was so frank and natural, and which completed so admirably the frank cordiality of her husband. He expressed to his friend enthusiastically the surprise and delight such a reception had caused him, and filled him with a tender and happy pride. Jean watched his wife with all his eyes, proud when the congratulating smile of the young officer seemed to share in his admiration, and pay him a silent compliment. Two or three times, however, it seemed that his comrade's look changed its expression strangely as he gazed on Alice, and his face became troubled rather than gay. A painful feeling stole into the young man's heart, and he began to grow impatient for the parting hour, so that he might be alone with his comrade.

Yet as soon as his friend had taken leave of Madame de

Kerdren and the carriage had taken them both to Lorient, Jean remained silent. What had he to say and ask? He really did not know; and as it frequently happens when the mind is absorbed in other graver matters, nothing but commonplaces were exchanged between them. At last, just as they came to their destination, while they were driving up the long avenue planted with trees which leads to the railway station, where the coachman allowed his horses to walk, Jean turned brusquely towards his friend with half-opened lips, but the latter, as if he had just awaited this signal to speak, said with eagerness:

"Please give Madame de Kerdren my sincerest thanks, and my most respectful sympathy. I find her as charming as ever; somewhat thinner and yet—" laying stress on these last words, and stopping between his words as if he hoped Jean would interrupt him. Then seeing that the young husband continued silent, he began again with somewhat of an effort.

"Do you not think you ought to ask for—"

"A consultation? Most assuredly, no," interrupted Jean in a tone of extraordinary bitterness. And at the same time he opened the carriage-door with so hasty a movement that it shut again of itself before he had time to get out. He again took hold of the handle still more violently, happy, as it were, to have an excuse to get angry with something, and jumped out like a man who was running away; but he was not quick enough to prevent his comrade saying to him:

"Who is talking about a consultation? See the doctor about her. Young women often have indispositions of which we understand nothing, and one of them, no doubt, is the cause of the change in Madame de Kerdren. And, hang it!" he continued, trying to joke, "when a man marries a beauty he has no right to allow one particle of her health and freshness to escape him."

Jean walked on without answering, and when they arrived on the platform the train was already there, and the travelers got into the railway carriage. He threw his comrade's valise, which he had just taken from a footman, into a compartment, as the employes were noisily shutting the

doors; he turned round quickly, and putting his two hands on his friend's shoulders, said: "Many thanks."

There was so much in the tones of his voice, as well as in the look which accompanied this single word, that the look went straight into the eyes of the young lieutenant; he felt his heart swell with sudden agony and he longed to do something, he knew not what, to bring back the smile to Jean's face. Yet when he began to talk, Jean stopped him with:

"Do not say a word to me now; but I thank you for having spoken. Outsiders see most of the game, and oftentimes we need the eyes of friends to make our own more clear." And then he pressed his hand without adding more, and went away without turning his head.

"Poor fellow," thought the traveler sadly, as he watched the stylish and distinguished walk of his comrade, who was so tall that he rose in height above the men who surrounded him. "Poor fellow," he repeated again when the train started, and Jean had turned back to salute him with a last gesture. Then he threw himself gloomily into his corner while the engine loudly whistled and threw enormous columns of smoke into the fast-advancing night.

CHAPTER XX.

When he got back into the carriage Jean made the coachman hurry, so that he arrived at Kerdren in less than an hour and a half. His wife did not expect him so soon, and, though she heard the noise of the carriage-wheels in the court-yard, Jean went up-stairs so quickly that she had not time to leave her place when he entered the drawing-room. She was seated in a big arm-chair; her head thrown back, her hands joined on her knees, her forehead and eyes lit up by a lamp placed behind her. Her attitude expressed rest as much as weariness, but Jean saw only the last while she half rose to greet him with a smile of welcome.

"Are you tired," he asked anxiously.

"No, only lazy," she gaily replied. "You know how I love arm-chairs. Did you get there in time for the train?"

While she spoke he looked at her over and over again, scanning every feature of her face.

Yes, very certainly she had grown thin, and he remarked for the first time beneath her eyes a pale bluish circle which added to their charm and beauty, but gave them a somewhat sad expression as well. He became madly angry with himself.

"What a shame that it should be a stranger!" he ejaculated. And as Alice, astonished at his silence, asked her question once more—

"Certainly," he replied. Then with an almost imperceptible tremble in his voice, he added:

"I am all the more glad that you do not feel tired, as I wished to ask you if you were strong enough to take that long trip to Paris to spend a few days there with me, and if you could start to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" she returned, somewhat amazed at this

sudden news. "Go to Paris to-morrow? Have you any business?"

"Well, yes. D'Elbrue has been lecturing me. It happens that several changes are to be made among the officers stationed at Lorient, and it is possible I may be amongst the number. I might write to the minister, but twenty pages of writing are not equal to five minutes' conversation. And, of course, I would not like to leave you behind—"

"I will be ready," she answered quickly; "nothing is better than the impromptu."

A strange smile passed over Jean's lips, but Alice had turned her head aside and did not perceive it. When she raised her eyes to look at her husband, he had resumed his ordinary expression, and till the end of the evening they talked only of what orders they had to give, and what they would have to prepare for their start.

The young couple had already been at the Grand Hotel about two days. Jean's business had taken up so little time that he had been able to devote all of his attention to his wife. He told her that there was no fear of his being moved, and yet, though the business which had brought him here was ended, he said nothing about going away and seemed to have forgotten the extreme haste he had shown in leaving Kerdren. In answer to his wife's questions about the length of his leave, he said he had a whole week, and he appeared disposed to profit by all of it.

His usual manner, though not altered very materially, was no longer the same since his arrival; and one would have said that some heavy weight bore down upon his mind. He seemed to be planning out something which he did not know exactly how to arrange to suit himself.

One evening, when he was seated in his room near the half-open window, Madame de Kerdren amused herself watching the never-ending variety of scene on the animated boulevard, comparing it to the quiet peace of their Breton nest, and talking about the new telephonic arrangements which she had seen during the day, and which had been provided since her departure from Paris.

"Can you imagine," she said laughingly to her husband, "that the day will come when we will hear all this noise,

thanks to a tiny electric thread, in the very middle of the park, and that we can listen to an act of 'The Huguenots' being sung while seeing the moon rise behind the trees, or hear the evening papers being called out, or the trumpet blown at the railway station?"

"That would be the death of railroad travelling," he responded just as gaily, "and we would grow old without passing our threshold. But in order to prepare ourselves for such a seclusion let us exhaust every resource of the civilized world while we are here. You, for instance, go to a doctor and take away a good prescription against that cold which has lasted too long. Will you not? You know how damp our Breton winters are, and I would not like to see you begin the autumn troubled with such an annoying thing."

"A doctor?" she returned, now very seriously surprised; "but really, I do not know any one, and this cough is nothing, I can assure you."

"Evidently," returned Jean promptly; "but why do you not have it seen to, were it only to please me. Then we will leave Kerdren no more."

She bent her head smilingly, but without answering, and once more drew near the balcony to look out, only her eyes now scanned but vaguely the carriages and foot-passengers, and her mind seemed far away from all she saw, evidently thinking of some painful idea, from the worried expression of her face. Jean observed her with anxiety, watching her melancholy thoughts mount one by one to her changeful face on which he had learned to observe the slightest impressions.

He pondered what was best to do and to say, fearing to increase her preoccupation if he spoke to her, and sad because he was obliged to be silent, when she suddenly turned round.

"And where will you take me?" she asked in a trembling voice which she tried in vain to overcome.

"Wherever you like, of course," he replied, though he became more and more troubled. "Is there any doctor who used to attend you, or do you know any one recommended by some friend and whom you would wish to have?"

"No, nobody. I have never been sick but once and that was in a Spanish village where I was waited on by the barber." And at the remembrance of her adventure she began to laugh with her fresh young laugh, relating the story to her husband and describing this modern Figaro armed with his lancet threatening her with numerous bleedings and contending against her father, whilst the mules and the goats, fastened in their stable and only separated from her bed by a very thin partition, made noise enough to make a well person sick. And yet she had been cured, and not so very much science was necessary for that. With her last words her gaiety departed, and she listened silently while her husband repeated a number of names; and to the end of the evening she remained pensive.

"You will not mind it, will you, if I think about it?" said Jean a little later, as they left the balcony, "if I think about it?"

"No, no," she answered sweetly. "I was somewhat astonished, that was all; but still it may be best."

She stopped a moment as though she were going to add something, but she said nothing, and that was the end of the matter till next day.

On returning to the hotel after having been out a part of the morning her husband told her he had arranged a meeting for the middle of the afternoon so as to avoid the weariness of a long waiting, and he mentioned a name unknown to her, but which was that of one of the most eminent doctors in Paris.

Alice made neither comment nor objection; she seemed disposed to allow everything to be done, but was anxious not to dwell on the subject, nor to ask the most insignificant question. She arranged her plans for the afternoon, dividing her time from the hour she supposed she would be free, and simply asking in what neighborhood they would be at the time of her visit.

And yet, during their breakfast, which they generally took at a little table laid in a corner of the great dining-room of the hotel, where the variety of the guests amused Alice very much, she suddenly interrupted herself in the middle of commonplace remarks on her surroundings, and asked:

"Is this doctor a specialist?"

"Well," said the young man, changing countenance a little, "I do not think so, and if he is, he is sufficiently well up on other points for us to be satisfied with him."

She simply replied by a nod of her head, and appeared to have put all trouble to one side until they got into the carriage to go to Rue de Grenoble. During the journey she was just as she always was—gay, natural, and interesting herself in all that passed round her, with the open-heartedness of a very young and simple disposition.

As she went up-stairs, it seemed to Jean, who was watching her closely, that she grew somewhat troubled, while her footsteps grew slower on purpose, so that he was not astonished when she stopped altogether and turned towards him, laying her two hands on her husband's arm.

"Jean," she whispered, "tell me the truth, I beg of you; why do you bring me here?"

She spoke with a great deal of energy, though in an entreating tone, looking at him at the same time with her great wide-open eyes, which seemed almost black in her face which had suddenly grown pale. Beneath the ordeal of the double interrogation Jean remained dumb; it seemed to him that his silence and his words were equally significant; his heart was pierced with a terrible anguish full of pity for the uneasiness of his wife that seemed a sorrowful echo of his own, as it were; and he failed to find a word in reply. The whole thing passed like a flash of lightning; his usual decision and energy took the upper hand, and, without allowing his voice to tremble in the least, he said in the most natural tone of voice possible:

"I have already told you why," he returned affectionately, taking gently in his hands which grasped his arm; "I want to have you entirely well; and had I known it would have so worried you—"

"You think me crazy, no doubt," she said, half smiling, "and as unreasonable as a child afraid of the very name of a doctor or a dentist, but if you only knew—"

Her smile disappeared, and she stopped again, as if she were afraid of what she was going to say. Just then two men came down stairs; their voices and the sound of their

steps made her start; she instinctively stood aside, and, as soon as they had passed her by, taking off their hats as they did so, she began to go up-stairs with a mechanical movement, as if she had merely waited on their account.

Before she went in Jean again silently asked her opinion with a gesture. "Would she really prefer not going?"

She shook her head and rang the door-bell herself decidedly. It was exactly three o'clock; and immediately, before they had time to sit down or say a word, the door opened again, and they were shown into the doctor's study.

When they came out the expression of Alice's face had entirely changed; all constraint had disappeared, and she turned towards her husband with a joyous smile which seemed to mock the terrors of the preceding moment. Whatever she may have thought and feared since the evening before, it was evident that her mind was altogether relieved, and, as soon as the door was shut, she began to tell Jean about what she felt.

"He is delightful," she said; "I am so pleased that we came. There were a whole lot of little ailments that needed seeing to, and you were quite right."

He listened to her without saying anything, watching her roll the long prescription round her fingers. Knowing the world better than she, he naturally understood better the professional impassibility of expression which a doctor is bound to wear face to face with his patient, and he was far from feeling reassured by the pleasant smiles or amiable way in which a man of the world would naturally talk with a pretty and charming young woman. He, on the contrary, thought he read something serious in the keen eye of the great savant, something very much graver than could be apprehended from the amiable way in which he asked her several seemingly careless questions. And he also remembered how that morning he had begged the doctor not to allow her to feel the least uneasiness, and carefully to guard his words and looks; and he thought with melancholy forebodings that the physician had simply played his rôle as he had begged him to do.

The prescription spoke solely of questions of precaution, detail, and certain rules of hygiene which would have suited

any one else just as well. It was like the box of pastilles sold by the magician of the fair, which would suit one person as well as another.

There is generally a grave reason for giving commonplace, not to say ridiculous, prescriptions, and they are suitable for two kinds of patients—one class has nothing the matter with them, the other has too much; those that Time—that greatest of doctors—will cure if left alone, and those who cannot be healed by human skill.

To which of these classes did Alice belong, and what was her sickness? Was it nothing or was it irremediable? Had he been anxious without any cause? And had the cautious warning of his friend been but the result of ignorant error? Ah, well! He could only judge of all that when he had seen the doctor who had examined his wife; yet he did not have courage enough to do it the same day, and he tried to excuse his conduct to himself by saying that he did not care to leave Alice so soon. In truth, he clung to those last hours of blissful ignorance as to salvation; and, like people who become voluntarily blind by shutting their eyes so as not to see, he closed his thoughts and his heart, so as to be able no longer to remember and think.

He begged of fate one more day of carelessness and hope, one single day without having anything more on his mind than an undefined anxiety which he could treat as a species of madness, as long as a more authoritative voice than his had not acknowledged its justice. He wished to feel once more, without a second thought, that he was young, happy and beloved. They spent the evening at the opera; and he was so gay, so tender, and so occupied with projects for the future, which he discussed with an ardor that was almost feverish—but which seemed joyous to both of them—that neither one of them perceived it.

CHAPTER XXI.

The next morning a different man went up the doctor's stairs. A night had passed, and with it much of his excitement. He had lost all his joyousness, and nothing remained but that terrible state of uncertainty, so bitter that oftentimes one prefers to know exactly what one has to dread. So also all that dazzling brilliancy of imagination with which he was filled the previous day, and which was so opposed to his ordinary disposition, was gone, never to return.

He now walked on, calm and in full possession of his will, feeling with an instinct that seemed almost absolutely sure, that a catastrophe was fast approaching, but determined at the end to flinch at nothing.

He had to wait longer than the day before, but the young man's face was so marble-like in its decided coldness that not a muscle of it moved, even he walked up and down with a rapidity that alone betrayed his emotion. After a quarter of an hour he was shown into the doctor's cabinet, the heavy padded door was shut behind him, and he mechanically took the seat the doctor offered him, looking at him through and through.

"I have come, sir," he said, and he briefly reminded him of the two visits of the preceding day, and how it had been arranged between them that in the second, while Madame de Kerdren was present, not a disquieting word should be said to increase the vague anxiety with which she was already tormented; but that now, wishing to know exactly how matters stood, he had come to ask what was the actual result of his investigations, and what was his opinion of the patient.

The doctor listened to all he had to say, indicating as he nodded his head that he had forgotten nothing, but all the while observing the young officer with an eagle look—a

look accustomed to weigh in the balance both the physical and moral strength of an individual, and to whom the habit of reading for thirty-five years in the human soul had given a power and a remarkable sureness. He knew he had to do with a man in the true and elevated sense of the word, and he decided to speak plainly.

"The first thing I should like to know," he returned in a quiet tone, "is whether Madame de Kerdren had not some near or distant relations who were consumptive?"

It seemed to Jean that some terrible instrument had struck him on his head, or he could not have felt so severe a pain; and, putting his hands mechanically to his forehead, he pressed his hands to his temples, for his veins had become so suddenly swollen that it seemed they had weighed down his head. His imagination went back, and he saw as in a mist the hot-house of Monsieur Champlion that evening the jewels had been solemnly delivered to him, and he was seated in an arm-chair behind a thin curtain of shrubs, while just beside him, separated from him by some few straggling branches, sat Mademoiselle de Valvieux borne down with silent grief. Then suddenly, amidst the murmurs of the crowds, he heard the conversation which had decided his future, but of which one phrase now stood out with the clear brightness of a flash of lightning seen in the night. He could have sworn that he heard once more the light mocking voice and the sneering laugh of the man who said to Monsieur d'Astier: "Do you not know that a lingering sickness is but a polite name given to the illness of consumptive parents who leave daughters to be married?"

Word for word he had heard the selfsame sentence rising from the old stones of the belfry of the monastery, and mechanically, with the rigidity of an automaton, he turned to the doctor, who was silently awaiting his answer, and repeated the same words in a strange fashion, without changing a syllable.

"Sir," cried the doctor, who had already remarked the change in Jean's face, and who now began to ask himself if the young man had not suddenly gone mad. But the doctor's word had recalled the young man to himself, and, recovering his self-control, the latter said:

"Excuse me, doctor," in a quiet, easy tone which contrasted strangely with the hollow voice in which he had last spoken; "I have expressed myself badly, very badly. Madame de Valvieux, Madame de Kerdren's mother, died of consumption at the age of twenty-four, just a year after the birth of her daughter."

Then he stopped suddenly, looking earnestly at the doctor, and interrogating him with his eyes, as a culprit before the bar of justice wonders whether the tribunal will condemn him solely on the proofs which he himself has furnished and the confession he has made.

It was difficult to read the doctor's thoughts; for the learned man was too profound an observer not to be impenetrable himself; he was not less impressed by the young man's calmness than he had been by his impetuosity. But he began again to ply his questions concerning the infancy and youth of Madame de Kerdren.

"Sir," returned Jean firmly, "I think we do not quite understand each other. You are preparing and weighing your words, while my only desire is to have you speak as frankly as you would to an ordinary, disinterested individual. You are thinking 'Dare I tell him the truth?' while I have come to hear the worst, if worst it is. You have formed an opinion on the state of Madame de Kerdren's health. She is seriously affected and you know how grave the case is. What matter does it make whether it be constitutional, or is occasioned by some accident. I am not thinking of by-gone years; I am planning for the future, and I have come to ask you as a man of honor and a doctor to give me an answer in all sincerity. Is there any earthly remedy which it is possible to employ—any remedy which money can procure? I have an ample fortune; by to-morrow I can be free from all obligations to my profession; and I am willing to give the very life-blood in my veins to my wife if it can bring her health."

"Sir," replied the doctor, who had risen from his seat, touched by the warm enthusiasm and nobleness of the young officer, "there are certain enigmas which science is unable to solve. At Madame de Kerdren's age, and with the strength and vigor which she still enjoys, medical science

dare not condemn her without hope. Yet, since you exact that I should be frank; I shall not conceal from you the fact that her condition gives rise to grave uneasiness. She has already—and in a very advanced degree—all the symptoms of consumption. Her face does not show it, simply because her complexion is remarkably beautiful and her skin is so exquisitely fine that it requires very little blood to color them. Her eyes are sunken; she must be losing her appetite, and she has fever very frequently. As for the accident and the shivering which followed it, of which she spoke to me yesterday, the most it could have done was to hasten the awakening of very much older germs which, I think, had already existed. You see, I am acting with you just as you wished."

Then they talked of a course of treatment prescribed by the doctor and two of his associates, to whom he had communicated his observations on the state of Madame de Kerdren's health in accordance with the young officer's expressed wish. The opinions of all three had been concurrent. She was bound to get worse if she stayed in France, even though the most sheltered port of the Mediterranean were chosen. On the other hand, the fragility of her frame rendered a trial of the icy air of the high Engadine, pure as it was, most dangerous; so that put an end to that new method.

This reason, the Count de Kerdren's profession, what he had said about his fortune, and his determination to attempt every remedy however desperate it might be, made the doctor speak to him of a somewhat strange remedy which had been attempted under the auspices of one of his associates with whom he had consulted the preceding day. His patient, a young man of about six and twenty, had been completely cured by sailing continuously for a whole year in the tropical regions, every day of which time he spent on deck. He was now altogether cured, and had resumed his usual course of living in Norway, and seemed to have forgotten that he ever had tuberculosis of the lungs.

Of course, it was impossible to affirm that what succeeded with one patient would succeed with another, but it was worth the trial, more especially as Alice could attempt it under the most favorable circumstances. The only captain

on board, Jean could, if he bought or chartered a vessel, direct its course wherever he would, in order to avoid a tempest or a sudden change in the temperature. He could land for a few days, if any signs of weariness of mind or body rendered it necessary, giving at the same time to this treatment the charm and the happy variety of a voyage for pleasure. Repose of mind, comfortable quarters, a little gaiety even, would be necessary. Every incident of the trip would provide them with fresh interest; and leisurely, without hastening in the least, just as the young patient wished, the voyagers might sail along the Mediterranean without ever losing sight of the coast-line; living continually in a bracing air which was sure to be pure, for it was far beyond the reach of civilization's corrupting influence.

"And, to sum up," added the doctor, "nothing remains but to put in practice that maxim which the melancholy resignation of the Russian opposes to every accident of his life: 'The future is in the hands of God, and he will do all it is possible for mortal to do.'"

"Doctor," replied Jean, as he rose with outstretched hand, "I do not think I can arrange my business in less than two weeks; but by that time I shall be at the post you have pointed out to me, trusting not only in the protection of heaven, but also in your skill, and I shall follow your directions to the letter."

"Do not speak of skill," returned the doctor; "it is powerless; and remember, since you have exacted the truth, that I see but little hope."

And then he told the young husband all the details of the daily treatment; but, summed up, they all amounted to but little, and were, in truth, the repetition of what he had said to Alice on the preceding day.

It was arranged that the month of October, which was very mild in Brittany, could be spent there without danger while the preparations for the journey were being made; and this would give the young couple three months of respite.

Accustomed though he was to face profound sorrows, the doctor could not help being deeply touched when he saw the decided energy of this magnificent young man to whom he had so clearly told that his happiness was soon to be broken,

and in whose heart there seemed such terrible agony, while he pitied the charming young woman he had seen the day before, whose happy and loved existence hung on so frail a thread. It was decided that Jean should write to the doctor, and the latter explained to Jean the nature of the observations the young husband was to send him.

"Good-bye, doctor," said Jean as he got up to take leave. "Believe me, I shall cherish the remembrance of your sympathy, and appreciate your frankness at its full value." He hesitated a little, and then continued: "Ought I not bring Madame de Kerdren to see you a few months from now?"

A change passed over the doctor's face, and, rapid as it was, Jean saw it.

"But," he answered, "for the winter your programme is made out. Do not leave sun and water. When June comes, we shall then know what is best to be done; for you must not return to Paris before that date."

"And were I to ask you to come to see us at Toulon or Marseilles?"

"In that case I would, of course, do as you wished."

Jean made his way to his carriage in the street; it had been waiting for him more than an hour, and he gave the coachman an address which was not that of the hotel, whilst the doctor returned to his study with a shrug of his shoulders.

CHAPTER XXII.

The most difficult thing of all was to tell Alice of the change in her life. "Her mind must not be disturbed," said the doctor. At the same time it was necessary to make Alice understand that her illness, which was well-nigh incurable, obliged her not only to leave Kerdren, but France; to change her habits, and even her style of life; to undertake a long foreign voyage after probable relief.

It would be hard to describe all that Jean thought and felt during the hour that succeeded his interview with the doctor; and, master of himself though he was, strong as was his courage and will, he experienced one of those fits of despair when everything seems to drift away from one. And yet, when he arrived at the hotel, the expression of his face had become once more natural, and the traces of the struggle through which he had passed were too carefully dissembled for any person except one in the secret to have noticed them. Alice teased him about returning so late, and, up to the very moment that they rose from the table, the most commonplace things were discussed.

"Well," asked Alice suddenly, as they were going to their room; "is not your leave up to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow—at ten o'clock."

"Is your business finished?"

"I got rid of the last of it this morning," he returned gravely, "and, if it suits you, we can take the train to-morrow morning. I would not like you to travel by night at this season."

"As to that, I am not afraid," she returned laughingly. "I never catch cold, and I like the cool air. You saw how the doctor listened to the story of the fire; only such love as yours could have been anxious about such a little thing."

However, I do not care, and I will start at any hour that suits you."

Jean bent his head without answering a word; he really had not the strength to utter a syllable. His gaiety and carelessness contrasted so bitterly with the reality that it seemed to the young man as though a sharp-pointed blade had suddenly sunk in the very depths of his life, and that it was as painful as the burning of live flesh. Notwithstanding his control over himself, during the remainder of the day, more than one shadow passed over his brow, and he had to make an effort to listen to Alice and to reply to her as usual. Since the cruel revelation of the morning, which had plunged him into a state of discouragement, he had learned to think that the misfortune which threatened him was likely to come upon him almost immediately; and if he saw Alice seat herself somewhat abruptly, or lean her hand on a piece of furniture, even though it were but a mechanical gesture, he felt ready to spring towards her, and, taking her in his arms, press her against his heart, fearing lest she was about to die. He knew nothing yet of the slow, agonizing progress of consumption, which recalls with its ever-recurring pains the most cruel tortures invented by the fertile imagination of the ancients in the name of their gods; and it seemed to him that, as he had been told to hope no more, it was all over now. That evening three telegrams were brought him; they came almost together and seemed unusually long. He read them without saying a word, and put them in his pocket-book without showing them to his wife who sat beside him, merely saying that they related to business.

This was so unusual that she raised her head in astonishment; not that she thought of inquiring what he did not wish to tell her, but this little mystery somewhat perplexed her.

Her husband's eyes glittered so peculiarly that the signs of agitation which had not struck her during the day came back to her mind, and she felt something serious was going to happen. Still her surmises were far from the truth, and she imagined that Jean's port had not only been changed, but that perhaps he had been ordered to make a voyage—a command impossible for him to refuse, and about which

he did not care to say anything to her until he had previously prepared her, so as to soften a separation which would necessarily be very painful.

Several times she thought she would mention the matter herself, so as to let him see she had guessed what troubled him, and that she was still ready to repeat to him what she had said when they were betrothed: "I will be as brave as a true sailor's wife ought to be;" but Jean was so reserved that she did not dare to intervene; and, not wishing to let him know that she no longer enjoyed the peace of mind which he was evidently trying to protect, she kept silent. The journey home was sad. The double constraint which weighed on both made them dumb, and they welcomed Kerdren as if all cares and embarrassments were left at its threshold. "And we were so happy when we left," thought Jean, "while now—"

He corresponded with his friends more than ever, and soon he learned that he had become the proprietor of a very handsome yacht, which had been ordered by a rich Englishman the preceding year and was now thrown on the ship-builder's hands by the sudden death of that luxurious nobleman. Built for the same purpose as the one which the Count de Kerdren had in view, it was strong enough to stand the wear and tear of a long, tempest-tossed voyage. Indeed, what the foreign nobleman had mainly asked for when he gave his orders to the best ship-builders in France was not merely a pleasure-boat, though the yacht was beautifully fitted up; he also wanted a fast sailer and a vessel strong enough to weather a storm. The hull was of oak, lined with mahogany; while all the divisions, partitions and doors were of polished walnut; so that the yacht looked as bright and gay as a country-house. The machinery, which came from a famous English house, was even more powerful than Jean needed; whether it was really so, or only because of the well-known originality of its first owner's countrymen, people said it had been built to go to the Polar seas in search of geographical discoveries, virgin lands, or those unexplored passages which the English so love.

Whatever was the reason or cause, the swift vessel was just what the young officer wished, and it needed but very little fitting out to have it arranged to suit the new owner.

A week or two would be all that was necessary to have it made as comfortable and ornamental as possible, for he wished to have a princely nest for his young wife. He had decided to superintend these last preparations in person; but his courage failed him when he was about to undertake the task.

To leave his loved and charming wife and that superb domain where he had known such happiness, though but for a few hours, seemed to him impossible; and so, at the last moment, he wrote to Paris to a celebrated upholsterer to take his place, and to spare neither diligence nor money to make a veritable palace of their floating home, in which, perhaps, months and months of their joint lives would be spent. Notwithstanding all the sermons he preached to himself, he had not yet gathered courage enough to tell Alice of the change which was about to take place in their existence, and he had already received his papers granting him an indefinite leave without pay from the 25th of October, before he set about telling Alice that they would be no longer at Kerdren next month. He actually did not know where to begin his attack on the happiness—a happiness so calm and profound in its uniformity and so linked with everything sweet and strong that it had seemed as though it would be never-ending.

There was not a single weak spot in that armor of confidence and joy which surrounded the heart of the happy young wife; she did not feel the slightest uneasiness; so that he scarcely knew how to prepare her. She had entirely gotten over the uneasiness caused by the visit to the doctor; and, having succeeded beyond his expectations, he was now obliged to begin his task from the very beginning and deprive her of that very peace of mind which he had been so anxious to secure for her. Thus, as we have seen, he had put it off from day to day. They had resumed their old life which had been somewhat monotonous in its regularity, but so great was their love that every day seemed different; their surroundings were the only things that changed.

The park and the woods were despoiled of their leaves; the oaks became brown, while the maple leaves turned red as blood. The weather was of undeniable beauty, and the air

was so mild that the dried leaves remained on the branches, for there was not a puff of wind to make them fall; the heather withered and crackled still louder beneath the horses' hoofs, but its tiny bells were still rose-colored, giving to the plain that hot reflection which seems like a ray of the sun left there after its setting. Night fell sooner; their rides grew shorter; yet never had Alice enjoyed everything with such liveliness. It might have been said that some mysterious presentiment made her foresee the blow that was about to fall upon her, increasing tenfold her power of enjoying and appreciating her present happiness.

"What a delightful season autumn is, and how charming is Brittany! The spring is delicious, the summer vivifying and health-giving, and this season is full of the most touching and peace-giving poetry. Look at all these golden leaves, the moss that is fast turning brown; it seems as though everywhere there was a fast-fading light which still illumines though it grows fainter and fainter. I am sure winter reserves new surprises for me, and I will love it as I have loved everything I have seen in this dear country. Oh, I am happy, so happy!"

No wonder the poor husband lost courage as he listened to such youthful and joyous raptures; it was terrible for him to be obliged to dispel such tranquillity; and every day he would say to himself, "To-morrow." Sometimes, also, he forgot the torture caused by the thought of the cruel revelation he would have to make, as well as the danger that threatened that beloved head, and, living only in the present, he would once more look happy and smiling.

One evening, however, he heard from the upholsterer who sent him word that in three days his labor would be finished, and he would be ready for the proprietor to examine his work. On the other hand, the friends he had charged with the necessary work of getting a crew together had found all the men that Jean could not procure in the village, that is to say, the machinists and a pilot. The last-named was a rather elderly man, but one marvellously well acquainted with every port, every bay, and every rock in the Mediterranean, which he had navigated from the time he was a child. A succession of misfortunes stranded him at Havre where he was

leading a laborious and miserable life. He therefore accepted with enthusiasm the unexpected engagement which had been offered him. As for the sailors and quartermaster, Jean knew that he could find more than enough men at Kerdren itself who would be only too delighted to go; and, in addition to the science which they had acquired during their term of service, he considered their fidelity through life and death which each man felt for him and his house would make the very perfection of a crew.

It thus became absolutely necessary to tell his young wife. It so happened that the evening he decided to do so was a little chilly, and the first fire of the season had been lighted in the open fire-place.

"How bright and gay the fire is," said Alice, drawing near as if she felt somewhat chilly. And then she stretched out her little hands towards the flames, turning them over and over like a child trying to warm both sides.

"That is the part of winter I like best," she said, "and I can imagine myself next month amusing myself while waiting for you, piling up logs and making hot tea to have ready for you when you arrive."

"Next month," returned Jean, trying to laugh, but with a trembling voice; "I have a surprise for you, for next month I believe we will have no need of logs and hot tea."

Then, without giving his young wife time to question him, he began to talk eagerly, telling about his projects of traveling, affecting to consider it a most reasonable and natural proposal, showing how charming it was, and glided over all the shadows of the tableau. He told her all about it in such an off-hand way that it seemed one of the most ordinary things in the world to buy a yacht, and, furnishing it like an ordinary house, to go to sea, tossing at the mercy of the waves and the winds for several months.

Alice listened, not knowing what to say. Was her husband joking or did she comprehend? Or was it she who had lost her wits and no longer understood the meaning of his words? As Jean felt that she was gradually becoming prepared, he went back and made his explanations more seriously, without once daring to look at her, fearing lest she might interrupt him in some way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The gist of what he told her amounted to this:

"The doctor," he said frankly, "advised me not to allow you to spend the winter in Brittany, not merely on account of your cough, but also because you are accustomed to an annual change of climate, and he was afraid it would be dangerous for you not to have it. What he desires most of all for you, after a warm climate, is the sea air which he thinks will strengthen you beyond everything, and yet he does not recommend any of the ports of the Mediterranean, where those who dread the cold are obliged to pass their winters. I spoke to him about Algiers; he liked that better, and we had almost arranged about it, when there suddenly came into my head an idea, strange, perhaps, but one which would secure your comfort, and at the same time our love to be alone with one another; and then you know how passionately I love the sea."

He then reminded his wife how often she had said that she was afraid he would grow weary of remaining on land, and how many times she had begged him to take service again.

"You knew," he continued, "that I did not care to go to sea, as all my happiness consisted in remaining by your side; but when I was told that a warm climate and the sea would do your health good, I thought that nothing could be more charming than to be on our own yacht, sailing in quest of whatever climate best suited us, and following the prescription ordered, still having our own dear home. I will thus have the honor of introducing my favorite element to you, and that in the Mediterranean, where I have so often mused and dreamed, would be pleasanter for me than any tour we could possibly make on land. I would so love to have my friend of olden days bring the roses back to the cheeks of my little friend of to-day, without the help of any one else.

Every one will say that we are mad, but what do we care? I gained a reputation for originality the day I entered the *lycée*, and all that you can be accused of, my dear little wife, is of being too merciful to your husband's extravagant ideas."

As Jean spoke, he grew more and more excited, and he finally almost convinced himself of the truth of what he said, mentioning with greatest enthusiasm all the good points of this strange proposition. Gradually his voice assumed its ordinary tone, and he began to smile at the astonishment which Alice's face showed, when she at last, getting over her first surprise, interposed innumerable questions and objections. All of them were to the point, and Jean was obliged to evade so many of them that Madame de Kerdren's anxiety was seriously aroused. All at once Jean was brought face to face with reality, and found that he had yet to surmount all the difficulties of his self-imposed task.

"Did you see the doctor again?" she first asked him.

"Do you think," he returned jokingly, "that doctors' visits are paid as we settled for ours—with a smile?"

"But what did he say to you?" she asked anxiously.

"Exactly what I have already told you; that we should have to fly from our fogs and almost continual rains to a warmer climate."

"And what besides? Oh, Jean, do tell me the truth," she cried, seeing him shake his head as if to repeat all he had said; "tell me, I beg of you. I am strong enough to listen to everything. Oh, do believe me."

She spoke quickly, and her face showed such real and bitter distress that the young officer felt his heart grow weak, and dreaded lest she should read the fatal truth in the changed expression of his face. Yet he had too well foreseen this trouble not to be able to overcome the weakness which lasted scarcely a minute; and with all the resources given by the heart, will, mind, when united together, he tried to reassure his young wife and to turn her thoughts away from the sorrowful ideas which filled her mind. And yet, to all he said, Alice made but one answer—

"Then why did you not tell me sooner, if nothing serious was the matter?"

He could say nothing when met by this obstinate and straightforward logic. In vain he told her about the difficulty of choosing a yacht, a choice that might take a great deal of time; then besides, he wished to surprise her. But she remained sad and unconvinced.

"My poor Jean," she said at last when both had remained silent for a moment or two, laying her head sorrowfully on his shoulder, "why did you marry me?"

"Why?" returned Jean, starting, "why, because I thus became the happiest amongst men, as you well know."

"Just now, perhaps, but later?" she asked sadly.

Her husband questioned her with his eyes, not wishing to guess her thought. He dared not ask the question, so he waited for her to speak, though his heart was bursting with agony. She pondered for a moment or so, and then added with affectionate sweetness:

"A sick wife is a heavy burden."

"Not at all," Jean returned laughingly "when she furnishes a pretext and an excuse for a glorious sea voyage."

He managed so well that by evening Alice had gotten over her fright and was almost reconciled to the idea of the change, and she began to look upon the plan as a mere pleasure trip. Jean had purposely exaggerated the enjoyment he hoped to derive from finding himself once more on board ship, sailing under his own flag, wherever and whenever caprice led him, like the lordly pirates of long ago, but without their deeds of rapine, and with far more comfort, initiating his wife into the life he best loved; and this idea to which he reverted again and again, helped to tranquillize Madame de Kerdren, who desired above all that her husband should have everything he wished.

Jean had counted on this, and the next morning somewhat comforted also perhaps by a delightful sun which made everything look gay, Alice appeared to have regained, not all her tranquillity, perhaps, but a certain confidence of the future which her natural elasticity of mind began to picture as fairly hopeful. From that time on the castle changed its appearance, and the approaching departure became the only theme of conversation. As soon as her fears were overcome, Alice never seemed tired of asking questions. When were

they to start? How big was the vessel to be? What would be best to take with them? What countries were they to see? All these topics gave her a chance to make a number of inquiries, and, day by day, Jean succeeded better and better in soothing her, and she became more and more attracted by the originality of the project.

As for Jean, so happy was he at having fulfilled his delicate task so well without frightening Alice, that he felt as relieved as though the weight from which he had protected his wife had also been taken from his own breast. And, after all, if hope is the most beautiful of theological virtues, it is also the easiest one to practice; and a heart must be very discouraged indeed, that does not allow one of its benevolent rays to penetrate it. So, after having suffered as much as it was possible to suffer on account of the misfortune with which he was threatened, Jean now began to ponder over what the doctor had said, picking out every hopeful word; and he repeated them so often that he finally began to believe them. He thought of the life-giving sea-breeze, of the warm sun whose rays he was going in search of; and he said to himself that both together would put life in the veins of his patient, and soon he would see her gain strength every day through the change of air, like a young and charming flower placed in healthy soil. By dint of telling Alice to believe all this, and even to rejoice at it, he finally succeeded in thinking so himself, and the last days which they spent at home were happy ones for both of them.

The news of so unusual an undertaking spread like wild-fire, not only in Lorient, but amongst the officers who were stationed in Paris or elsewhere, and as Jean had foreseen, it was considered a mad project. This indefinite leave, which would interfere so much with his profession, asked for without any plausible reason, this trip which he was about to make with his young wife to whom he had been married only a few months, and especially the suddenness of this fancy, appeared incredible. And, as usual, public opinion exaggerated everything, and far more extravagant projects were attributed to the young officer than those he had really in view. His originality, it was said, had degenerated into downright eccentricity, and a general sympathy was felt for

the poor lady who was obliged to submit to the caprices of such a queer disposition.

The news had appeared much more natural in his native village; the captain wishing to become once more a seaman without leaving his wife, had bought a vessel, taking men from Kerdren with him to serve as sailors. What could be more natural? The peasants' logic did not go any further than: "He wished to do it, and Madame likes it; he is able to do it, and why shouldn't he?"

Madame de Kerdren's maid had enthusiastically accepted the proposal to accompany her mistress on board, and, as the cook humbly begged for the same favor, it was decided she should replace the usual master cook on the yacht. The expedition seemed to both of the servants somewhat like a fairy tale, in which both of them were about to play a part, and so overjoyed were they at the whole thing that the trunks were packed as quickly as if by magic. They would not be more likely to be sea-sick than Alice; besides in any case there was a large enough staff, even if they were ill, to do all that was required. The days passed like hours; nothing now remained to be done save to leave. One morning, as she entered the library, Alice saw that the piano was taken away, and she asked her husband the reason.

"You will find it on board," he returned, "I first thought of having another sent on, but there is a memory attached to every note of this one, which it would have been impossible to replace."

The farewell letter of explanation addressed to Madame de Semiane had gone after her to Hungary, and the answer had come in the form of a telegram with any number of points of exclamation, while the text ran so strangely that, accustomed as the telegraph operator was to very strange communications, he was more than surprised. "Possibly you may be going to talk to the great Rameses in Egypt," she said at the end; "that would be nothing astonishing, for you have always spoken his language; but to have transformed your wife in such a short time into a Sphinx and follower of the Pyramids, is madness. I may stop at Trieste to scold and kiss you." Jean had arranged for the well-being of Alice's protégés, and a rapid round of visits, most of them

made with cards only, had put himself and his wife on a proper footing with the neighborhood. The baggage had gone, so, arm in arm, the two young people said "good-bye" to Kerdren.

The hour of their departure had re-awakened their emotion, and the future seemed less sure to the young officer and less gay to Alice through the melancholy of that last hour. Doubts rose anew in Alice's mind. This resolution was so grave and so complete a change. Her husband must have had some very strong motive for it. And, despite herself, she began once more to find the reasons and explanations which he had given her totally inadequate. She said to herself that the doctor had deceived him, perhaps, by giving him hope, feeble and doubtful though it was, and perhaps he was taking his wife away never to bring her back. She might not even have the consolation of finishing her life under the roof beneath which they had enjoyed those months of such perfect happiness. Such were the bitter thoughts they both harbored in their hearts at the solemn moment when they were entering, as it were, an unknown world. A trench, hollowed by painful doubts, seemed to lay between their past and their future.

"When shall we be together here again?" said Alice sadly, as she returned from her last walk in the park.

"About June, no doubt," returned Jean firmly, "for that is the date which the doctor has fixed for me to take you to visit him again."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Monsieur and Madame de Kerdren had been at Marseilles the evening before, while their yacht, clean and as prettily adorned as possible, awaited them in the waters of the port. At first they had some idea of embarking at Havre, but the sea along the coasts of France is a bad enemy to meet, so that Jean did not wish, especially just at the very beginning of their journey, to have his wife take so severe a sea voyage. So the yacht had been sent on in advance, and during that time the young couple had made their way slowly to Marseilles by railroad, stopping whenever Jean thought Alice was tired. At Marseilles they found more faces they knew than they had any idea of, and, as their trip had become public property, several spectators were sure to be present when they took their departure.

The young pair was so charming, so rich and handsome, that it furnished the most brilliant society circles much food for gossip, and the idea of spending six months or more all alone between the sea and sky piqued the curiosity of everybody. In another day and night the climax would be reached. As soon as he arrived, Jean went aboard where he inspected everything to give his last orders. As Alice was rather tired, she remained at the hotel.

As she had said to her husband when he proposed to take her to Havre to learn her opinion about the arrangements which had been made for her comfort, she trusted entirely to his judgment, sure that he would be far more particular about everything that related to her than she could possibly be herself.

The crew were at their posts, the baggage unpacked and arranged, and the day of their start was simply superb. A brisk wind whitened the waves, but the sun was just as hot as in summer, while the sea assumed that peculiar blue, oily

and yet transparent, which can be seen only in the waters of the Mediterranean.

At three o'clock the carriage which brought Monsieur and Madame de Kerdren drew up, and Alice took her husband's arm to walk on the quay. She trembled a little and turned pale, courageous as she was.

The emotion of the young officer, if he felt any, was betrayed only by the increased coldness of his manner, and the crowd drew back, instinctively repelled by his haughty glance. It was a well-bred crowd, at all events, that seemed as though it was merely loitering there through idleness, and it dispersed in a moment with a kind of peculiar movement, as though it hoped to make passers-by believe it was merely taking a promenade.

A boat with padded seats was waiting the arrival of the young woman. Dizzy and somewhat upset by seeing so many people looking at her, and anxious to get through with this last ordeal, she had already put her foot on board, when her husband's touch made her look around. A little group formed of five or six officers in uniform were standing near her. They were Jean's comrades who, having heard the news, had hastened to bid him godspeed and to pay their respects to Madame de Kerdren at the last minute. The smiling and natural cordiality with which they spoke to Alice of her trip consoled her at once, and in the midst of all the commonplaces of the curious crowd, these wishes and smiles seemed to her all the more amiable.

On his part, Jean, though his mind was set on one single thought, felt the same charm while listening to those voices and familiar exclamations that cross-questioned him so gaily, which took away from his departure all the unpleasantness which his isolation had made him feel; so that little by little his face cleared up.

One of the young officers pointed to a boat which was lying a few yards from the shore, and indicating also the yacht whose chimneys had already begun to pour forth smoke, said:

"Will you allow us to conduct you, Commander?"

Jean uttered an enthusiastic "Yes" in reply. Monsieur and Madame de Kerdren then stepped into the young offi-

cers' boat, their own following them. Jean in the ardor of his hospitality asked his old companions to make a stay in the principal salon of the vessel, into which he had shown them; but the officers knew that, despite his kindly offers, he must be longing for the sea in his secret soul. So after a few moments of courteous and friendly chat, they took their leave. As they did so the whole crew were assembled on deck, ranged in a kind of half-circle, awaiting their orders.

When Madame de Kerdren stepped on the last rung of the companion-ladder, the tri-color was hoisted and the men doffed their hats as with one accord. Now they stood on deck once more, and with the same graveness held their worsted caps in their hands, doing homage, as it were, to those friendly good-byes. The deck was literally covered with flowers. Bouquets had been presented to Alice by the officers, and the sailors had arranged them while the company had gone down to the salon. Touched to the heart, Alice thanked them; then, one after the other, Jean's old companions stepped down the companion-ladder, the rowers set their boat in motion, going so fast that in a few minutes their waving hands were no longer to be distinguished in the midst of the innumerable boats which filled the port. Just then the first movements of the steam propeller were felt on board the yacht. An indescribable emotion filled Alice's heart, and, turning towards her husband, her eyes filled with tears; and, motioning him to come to the deck-rail against which she was leaning, she said, taking his hands and repeating the words of the Breton fishermen:

"Ah, God, protect us, for the ocean is so vast and our boat is so small."

Half an hour later Alice went below; and, guided by Jean, she visited the new Kerdren which was henceforth to be her home. The young couple had both agreed that no other name was so suitable to their yacht as that of the place where they had been so happy; it was thus that "Kerdren" could be read on the prow of the yacht, inscribed in letters of gold.

Accustomed though she was to the attentions of her husband, Alice had expected to find a charming nest, but even she was not prepared for the magnificence which awaited her.

Several partitions had been taken down; so that the rooms set aside for the commander were unusually large. Jean's study was hung with deep-hued tapestries like the library in which they had spent so many hours at Kerdren, but in place of the high chairs which would have been so easily upset, there were nothing but low, wide divans covered with soft cushions, the very look of which was restful, and a few chairs fastened to the floor round a table secured in like manner. Alice's room, lit up by unusually large openings, was hung with antique Japanese silks, the ground of a delicate rose-color, exquisitely embroidered, and showing here and there silver swans, fantastical flowers of gold or silver, from which wandered forth a whole procession of the quaintest possible figures. All the pictures which Alice liked best at Kerdren were there—in a word it was impossible to imagine anything gayer and brighter than this charming little room. The salon was medium-sized and square, and furnished in a most original way. The hangings were of a delicate shade of water-green brocade, the chairs being upholstered to match; on this were to be seen flowers and marine plants, either done in appliqué or embroidered, shaded so marvellously well that it seemed as though they were growing. Tall reeds, irises, gladiolas, rose above great tufts of white and yellow pond-lilies and red-lined water plants. The flowers were mingled harmoniously, grouped and designed as they were by an artist's hand, so that it seemed that one was journeying between two fragrant and verdant banks. In the corners were hidden immense flower-pots out of which rose almost to the ceiling a quantity of real foliage plants; the piano was also concealed in a flowery nook; and then everything was seen in that peculiar light produced by the intermingling of the reflection of the water, which produced an effect which was strangely charming.

"It is a naiad's grotto," said Jean, as he listened to the delighted exclamations of his wife, "and I am so glad it pleases you."

These rooms with the dining-room, which was on deck, comprised all the living apartments of the young couple, and soon Alice grew so accustomed to them that it seemed to her that she had never lived anywhere else.

Her terrors vanished one by one, and she asked herself how could she have been so stupid as to be frightened by so natural a project. The movement of the waves seemed to her like a lullaby; the heavens forever fair and beautiful; and never had her life of happiest intimacy with her lover appeared so charming as in this strange and isolated nest where no eye could perceive them.

As for Jean, with the agony of a gambler who had staked his whole fortune on a single card, he watched his wife's face hour by hour, and he thought he saw freshness and health gradually coming back to it. Her complexion became rosier from the kisses of the breeze, while Alice said every day she felt hungrier and hungrier, adding that when she fell asleep, rocked by the movement of the vessel, her slumbers were what they were long ago in her cradle, so sweet and peaceful were they.

She spent every day on deck, as the doctor had ordered her; and she had gradually learned that swinging walk peculiar to sea-faring folk. And the sailors became livelier and set about their work with a better heart when they saw the graceful form of their lady walk up and down; whilst the "Kerdren," whose good qualities had not been exaggerated, fitted over the sea light as a bird.

CHAPTER XXV.

Two months had passed, and, unless one were blind, which certainly was not the case with Jean, it was impossible not to see the terrible change that had taken place in Madame de Kerdren. The first two weeks they spent on the yacht the brave experiment seemed to have succeeded, and the young officer had landed twice to telegraph to the doctor triumphant bulletins. Alice scarcely coughed, slept well, ate a great deal, and though she did not actually become more plump, the fresh rosiness of her complexion made her look nearly as well as when she had been in the best of health. Then suddenly everything changed, and now, in place of gaining, it was plain to be seen that she was losing strength every day. The absolute change of air and mode of life had at first seemed to give her power. The keen, brisk air had invigorated her weakened blood, giving it its former warmth and quick circulation. But once she had become accustomed to the sea air, it had no longer the same effect, and Alice suffered a relapse which left her perhaps all the more worn out on account of the fictitious strength she had temporarily acquired.

At first the difference was scarcely perceptible, and Jean did not grow anxious, thinking it was merely a passing indisposition; at the end of a week, however, he began to realize that she was losing strength constantly; that every day left her weaker and weaker, and that the dread disease had started on its downward course. Then, hour by hour suffering the most frightful of agonies, obliged to witness slowly approaching a misfortune which must necessarily be fatal, he soon began to watch the progress of the disease, observing each movement and breath which differed in ever so slight a degree from those of the previous day, and thinking of the change which would take place by to-morrow,

Nothing in this world could equal the agony of such torments, and when he knew himself to be alone and undisturbed, he gave way to fits of heart-broken despair. Indeed, it is easy to imagine all that a man must feel, when he sees the one he loves best face to face with a deadly danger, knowing that he can do nothing to help her, condemned to be a mere spectator just as though he were watching the rise of a flood which gradually mounts to the knees, then to the waist, a little later up to the eyes, finally covering the very head itself with its waves. At the very thought of such an idea he became mad with rage, and all the blood of all the Kerdrens with their obstinate motto: "When a Kerdren holds, he never lets go," boiled in his veins at the thought of how powerless he was.

During these two months he had done everything, following to the very letter the different treatments recommended by the doctor—creosote, iodine, some special article of diet, hot applications, etc., which he administered to her himself. She allowed him to do anything he wished with adorable docility; but nothing seemed to do her any good or harm while she continued daily to grow weaker and weaker with a terrible and implacable regularity.

One day she was not able to go up stairs alone; her feet seemed so heavy and her limbs so feeble. She made a sign to her husband; he put his strong arm round her waist to help her, not daring to carry her lest he should frighten her, and yet supporting her as much as though she had been in his arms. Alice's walks on deck grew fewer and fewer; she got out of breath when she walked round it twice, making every day more and more use of the upholstered bamboo reclining-chair which had been placed in the fore part of the vessel. Her hands were still active, and yet, one evening when she was playing the piano she was compelled to stop whilst executing a brilliant piece, the rendition of which had fatigued her. Ever afterwards she limited her repertoire to short pieces not difficult to execute, whose charm consisted in the expression and feeling with which she rendered them. Without knowing it she played more slowly; indeed, every one of her actions had become so lately, and these calm melodies, somewhat sad and unusually sweet, seemed

the very personification of what she then was. Her breath was too short and her voice too feeble to sing, so that she had to stop one evening, and never dared take it up again.

Her song of the swan had been Schubert's "Adieu," those melancholy verses which speak of death. She had paid no attention to it, but Jean had remarked it; so in addition to his other sufferings these words remained engraved on his heart.

Through one of those mysterious blindnesses, which through the dispensation of the all-seeing Providence veil the eyes of the sick with a thick bandage, Alice was the only one on board who was unaware of her own weakness. The progress of the malady had been so gradual that it was impossible to gauge it, save by referring to the past, and that she never thought of doing. The languor of her body seemed to penetrate to her mind, taking away from her the memory of preceding days, and prevented her from feeling how different a woman she was from the one that had climbed up the companion-ladder two months before.

Jean had warned the crew, and none of the men (who adored Madame de Kerdren, and watched her face most anxiously every morning) ever gave the least sign that they thought she was ill, and never dreamed of asking how she was when she spoke to them so gently when she passed by them.

And thus Alice was blind as blind could be. She felt herself tired out, that was certain, but she thought it was merely a want of circulation, and waited patiently, thinking that the old wine and iron would soon cure her. Once only did she make any allusion to what she felt. Her husband, seated beside her, was describing to her the coast of Tunis which they were fast approaching, never dreaming that her thoughts were elsewhere, when suddenly she said:

"Do you know how old my mother was when she died?"

Jean shivered and, not having strength to answer, he made a kind of mechanical movement with his shoulders.

"Scarcely twenty-four. Is it not strange that I should have an attack of the same illness almost at the same age?"

She spoke so quietly that Jean understood how far she

was from suspecting the truth and then a moment afterwards, seeing that he kept silent she took up some other subject. During their journey the travelers had stopped at Syracuse, Athens, Constantinople, on the coasts of Asia Minor and Egypt. At first Alice used to land and go about a little, but gradually she became satisfied with a glance at the different cities from the yacht itself; and at Tunis Jean had to go alone to spend a few hours on land.

Two more weeks had passed. Alice now never left her reclining chair, and she had given up attempting to do anything. Though Jean ardently desired that nothing should be changed in the routine of her ordinary life, he was now obliged to carry her in his arms as though she was a child, and, while her hair was being dressed every morning, she began to look sorrowfully in her mirror on noticing how thin her face was growing. It seemed to her that her eyes grew larger and larger at the expense of everything which surrounded them, while the bluish circles beneath the eyelashes gave them a brilliancy and fire that was positively dazzling.

The moment she tried to walk, a smothering fit would come over her, and they were obliged to place her in an arm-chair filled with several pillows. The moment she felt one of these attacks, a strange and unusual expression would pass over her face, and she would gaze at the sea, as if to ask from the transparent waves the solution of the enigma of which she was thinking. One day she noticed tears in the eyes of a sailor who was looking at her from a distance, and this naïve sorrow, of which she scarce knew the reason, had stirred a thousand confused thoughts within her brain.

Then she was also struck with the change in her husband's countenance. The fits of despair of the young man injured his health, and that frightful sorrow that had to be borne alone, filling every hour of the night and every moment when no one was near him, was a perpetual drain on a man of his disposition. What hurt him most were the imperious and painfully absurd revolts which rose from his heart against heaven again and again like the rebel angels. He swore he could not—nay, would not, bear it; that he would not allow the wife he loved to be torn from him, and that she should not have been given to him only to be

taken away. "Providence," he said, "put this woman in my way. I did not know her—I never asked for her; my lonely life was enough for me. Why does God want to drag her from me now, and plunge me into a grief so deep that no human tongue can name it?"

So great was his sorrow that it seemed to deprive him both of good sense and justice; he became a doubter and a sceptic, and after having upbraided God with so terrible a trial, he ended by declaring that he did not believe in him, feeling he would rather that God did not exist than he should be insensible to his prayer. He told himself that Chance governs everything on this earth; it was easier for him to dispute and fight with this new god, and he determined that if he was not able to conquer it, he would at least so arrange things that very soon he would be reunited to her whom death had snatched from his arms. For, after having with touching faith cherished every ray of hope there was, he looked the truth face to face, and understood that the life of her who was so dear to him was only a question of days, and that soon he would be alone forevermore. The most extraordinary projects would then come into his head at the thought of the time when he would be forever separated from his wife; and in the black grief which overcame him—a grief that was almost madness—the idea of suicide constantly lingered in his mind. He imagined that he would take Alice in his arms as she slept her last sleep, and carry her at night into the little boat which he always used; then, once he were away from the yacht, he would manage somehow that the water should rush into his tiny bark and sink it, and that he, with his beloved dead, would go down, down, gently, gently, until thus both should be buried in the great tomb that has received so many mariners. These thoughts alone prevented him from drifting into despair, and he dwelt on them with a feverish ardor.

But Alice's weakness had become so great that it was necessary for the doctor to see her every day; there was no longer any hope of her cure, but he might relieve her, so, on that account, Jean ordered the yacht's course to be changed for Alexandria. Instead of journeying towards

Morocco, the vessel had been turned towards the Egyptian coast, the temperature of which was more favorable to Alice. Some time previous to that, he had procured, through means of his doctor in Paris, the addresses of several doctors living in the different ports at which he might touch; so he had only to decide which of them would be the best to take on board for an indefinite time. The negotiation succeeded better than he thought it would. A young hospital student from Paris, who had thought he could gain a practice in Alexandria, had gone there only to eke out a miserable existence; for the last year he had been a victim to the malaria so prevalent in the country, and he was absolutely unable to secure a practice. The idea of being able to return to his country, after a trip which ensured him rest and a handsome remuneration in the meantime, pleased him, as one can easily imagine, and the next day he came on board the "Kerdren."

Alice heard of his arrival without showing any particular sign one way or another. Possibly she might have already begun to understand how very ill she was, though her courage forbade her to complain, or it may be she saw nothing to frighten her in such a piece of news. Whatever may have been the cause, the only feeling she displayed was one of affectionate gratitude. Another guest besides the doctor had come aboard, a young midshipman named Yves Kernevel, a distant cousin of Jean's, who had found his way to the vessel through a strange combination of circumstances. The very first person the Count de Kerdren met at Alexandria was his young cousin, who had welcomed him with outstretched hands, with sincere and loving sympathy, offering to be his guide through the city. So when Jean and the doctor had made their arrangements, the ensign took his cousin to his lodgings, saying with the utmost simplicity:

"Since I received your letter that brought me the news in the Canaries of your marriage, and then of your perfect happiness—" he hesitated a little before adding the last words—"I have had no news of you; and the very first thing I would have done, on returning to France, would have been to find out—"

He stopped for a moment as though he sought to find words for what he wished to say; and then, with affectionate abruptness, beneath which it was easy to see his loyal affection, he resumed, as he pressed Jean's hand:

"I have asked and have been granted three months' leave of absence, so I started immediately for one of the ports where I thought I was most likely to see you. So, now I am at your service for as long as you want me."

And as the Count de Kerdren made a gesture of haughty interrogation—

"I know everything," rejoined the young man sadly; "let me be with you, I beg of you. I will keep myself out of the way, and will not interfere with your privacy; but oftentimes it is well to have some one to whom one can confide the grief that is choking him."

"What grief?" asked Jean haughtily, "that she is dying?"

Yves bowed his head without saying a word, and the two men were silent for some time.

"Thank you," said Jean finally; "I will come for you this evening. I must prepare her."

The midshipman made an effort to retain him. He had seen the tears rise in his cousin's haughty eyes, and he knew better than to offer to go with him, were it only for one single step.

The appearance of things on board changed for the better as soon as these two new guests arrived. Moved by the same sentiment of delicacy, the doctor and Yves had both insisted on taking their meals by themselves, and quietly without ostentation they kept away, as much as possible, from the deck where Alice generally sat. Only now and then they came to pay their respects to her, sit down for a little, chat and talk, thus making life somewhat gayer for the patient.

The stifled sorrow of the young Count de Kerdren, and the increasing feebleness of his wife, made them dumb at times, and the presence of strangers who were not sufferers like themselves did them good. The doctor spoke of the unfortunate year he had spent in Alexandria, and of all the peculiarities of the country, while the young midship-

man humorously described the two years he had served at sea. From the very first Alice liked her husband's bright young cousin, who, young as he was, had so many solid and substantial good qualities both of heart and mind; while he, on the other hand, felt like a fond, protecting, elder brother towards the charming woman who, changed though she was, still attracted every one at first sight.

As the midshipman had foreseen, Jean found a relief far greater than he could have believed, in having some one to whom he could talk of the awful grief which was gnawing away his very heart; and of the recollection of that happy past, short, it is true, but every moment of which had been so keenly relished.

From the very first day, he had thrown all the responsibility of navigation on his cousin, and that was an unspeakable relief, for he was thus enabled to drop the mask and brood over his despair during the night, whilst during the day he could give every moment to the care of his beloved patient, for whom he tried to invent some new refinement born of his love and adoration, which grew stronger and stronger every day.

The doctor's prescriptions had relieved Alice in a great measure of her difficulty in breathing, and this allowed her to talk more freely; and many an hour did Jean spend seated beside her, thinking, when he shut his eyes, that they were still wandering beneath the shady trees of Kerdren, discussing their future, and the sweet illusion would last until it would be dispelled by a fit of coughing, which left Alice exhausted, and suddenly destroyed his sweet dream.

CHAPTER XXVI.

From his conversation with his cousin, the midshipman had guessed the resolution which despair had caused Jean to take, and though he had not said a word to him on the subject, he knew that he had determined not to survive his young wife. To make an appeal to his religious scruples would have been folly in his present state of mind. It was more than likely that his fit of atheism would be short, and yet, while it lasted, though it might be only a few days, he was capable of doing a most infamous deed. He intended to watch him incessantly from the time he would be bereft, but he knew full well that there would be times when that watchfulness would be relaxed, and besides that, he knew too well the strength of Jean's will not to dread the very idea of a struggle with him. To open Alice's eyes and avail himself of her influence while it lasted, was something too cruel even to be thought of. So the poor fellow grew sadder and sadder, trying to find out how he could save those he loved.

It so happened that one day Jean, worn out by his ceaseless watching, had yielded to Alice's request and had gone down stairs to throw himself on a divan, leaving his wife in care of Yves; the latter asked her if she would like him to read aloud to her. At first she listened attentively, then after a moment or two she made a sign to him to put down his book, and, speaking very low, as she was in the habit of doing since she had become so weak—

"Yves," she said, making a gesture to invite him to draw closer, and pointing with her finger to the way her husband had gone; "listen to me; I am going to confide in you. Do not allow him to be too much alone when I am gone, and, now that you know me, talk of me to him when he will be alone; it will be less sad for him."

She stopped for want of breath, and, touched to the very heart's core, strangely upset, the young midshipman bent towards her in order to catch her faintest word. He was so astonished at the unexpected request and the clear way in which Alice had judged of her state of health that he could not find a single word to say in reply.

"You will do it, will you not?" she said in an anxious tone, as she opened her eyes.

Yves protested his devotion and absolute obedience in the most enthusiastic manner, trying at the same time to interpose a word of hope.

"No, no," she returned sadly; "I know that the end is fast approaching, and yet I dare not speak of it to him. I am afraid of breaking his heart; but you will tell him all I have said, and my love, my gratitude."

She stopped, and while she tried to regain strength, Yves, his face covered over with his hands, began to reflect. He thought of the horrible constraint under which Jean labored in trying to appear calm and hopeful, and then of the restraint which Alice had imposed on herself, fearful of the despair of her husband; and he silently asked himself if an interchange of sorrows would not be far better than such poignant and secret griefs. The confiding way in which Alice had told her grief, joined to her resignation, had stirred him to the very quick, and it seemed to him that, as both husband and wife saw clearly into the inevitable future, a mingling of sorrows was far preferable to these secret griefs; to be able to speak to each other with an open heart, far from creating sorrow, would be a relief; and then, what peace would Alice's words bring into her husband's rebellious heart. He managed to tell his thought as delicately as was possible, and, just as he had finished, Jean's pale face appeared above the stairs that led to the cabin. Yves made some commonplace excuse for getting away, and the young couple were left alone. Alice seemed nervous, while her hands played anxiously with the fringe of her shawl. Her eyes wandered incessantly round her, while on her lips seemed to float a question which she dared not ask. Something in her attitude struck her husband, and he began to question her with manly tenderness.

"What is the matter," he finally asked; "do you want anything?"

She hesitated a little, and then said simply:

"Are we a long way from the coast, Jean?"

"No," he answered, very much astonished; "why do you ask? Do you wish to land?"

"No, no; only I thought—indeed, I wish you could bring a priest to me," she said sweetly.

The young officer started at this word.

"Do you wish, my love, that we speak to one another with open hearts?"

With quiet dignity and touching courage, she began to tell him what she was thinking about, speaking of her fast approaching death so quietly that he listened to her with amazement, asking himself if he understood her, and if the separation to which she alluded was the final one.

Meanwhile, as she talked on, her agitation reappeared, and she was obliged to make an effort to continue.

"I have so much to tell you," she whispered every now and then.

And she passed her hand over her forehead in anguish, as though to gather together her scattered thoughts.

"For a long time I wanted to thank you," she began in a moment. "You gave me the most complete happiness, whilst I have only brought trouble and misfortune into your life. It is so sad to leave you now, and it pains me so to go."

Tears hovered on her eye-lashes and she stopped, carried away by her emotion, while her husband, all at once forgetting his reserve of the last few months, overcome in spite of himself by the suffering, began to tell her all that passion and despair can inspire in a man.

At first, he had listened to her, struck by her unexpected words, not daring to interrupt her poor weak voice, yet feeling in his heart of hearts such a pain as he had never known.

Certainly he knew full well that it was impossible to save her life; and there was not a single moment when that cruel thought ever left his mind; but to hear her condemn herself seemed, if possible, a yet more deadly blow.

Forgetting, therefore, all his resolutions, he gave way to his despair with immeasured impetuosity, showing how intense his suffering was, declaring he would or could not stand the loss of his beloved. He accused heaven; he defied death; he swore if the very essence of his life was taken from him he would and could not continue to live.

"My poor Jean," said his young wife, almost in despair, "you are blaspheming."

"I do not know whether I am or not," he answered in a deep voice; "but I do know that my sufferings are too great for me to endure."

"You will return to Kerdren," she returned.

"Kerdren without you? Kerdren, where you were first attacked by your sickness? I hate Kerdren!" he said.

"Then you will go back to sea, and stay there forever?"

"The sea? The sea now?" returned he.

He began again to talk about his sorrow, showing his despair, which passed before the frightened eyes of Alice like a terrible and powerful river.

She did not know the extent of his passionate and ardent disposition, of a type which belonged to another century, and she had not foreseen that he would revolt against her suffering so.

He soon perceived the harm he was doing his wife, stopped suddenly, and, seeing how pale she had grown, immediately proposed to take her down to her room.

When he had placed her on the bed, she made him bend his head toward her, with her hands still around his neck; and, in a low whisper, speaking with such emotion that the beating of her heart could be heard, she said to him:

"Jean, at least promise me that you will never—"

Just then the doctor came in, thinking his patient had fainted, and Jean profited by his arrival quietly to take his leave. He understood what Alice intended to ask him, and even to her he was determined not to make such a promise.

All night she remained in a kind of agitated sleep from which she would suddenly awake, and Jean, who remained at her bedside till morning, cursed himself a hundred times for his imprudent forgetfulness.

The evening before the helm had been put toward land,

as Madame de Kerdren had wished, and by sunrise Yves anchored out from a little village on the African coast, where he thought he ought to be able to find a missionary, or at least directions where one could be found at some short distance.

Alice was on deck early in the morning; the sight of land and the pointed roofs, which one could perceive on shore, amused her, while the motion of the little boats, attracted by their arrival, and which sailed around the yacht, seemed to her a gay sight.

Neither she nor Jean made the slightest allusion to what had passed between them the evening before; but she watched him with such an expression of sad and tender supplication that every now and then the young man felt cast down. Yet, for all that, he landed in the middle of the morning without having said a single word, and more enraged than ever at his suffering, as he thought of the errand on which he was about to go.

He did not return to the yacht until well after lunch, announcing in sharp, brief tones that his search had been successful, and that a French missionary, located in the village, would visit Madame de Kerdren that afternoon.

Whether the walk had relieved his nervousness, or because of the satisfaction of having been fortunate enough to find without delay what his wife wished, he appeared calmer than in the morning.

The sun was very strong, but, notwithstanding the shade of the awning under which Alice was stretched, the noise of the sea wearied her that day, and she very soon asked to be carried below. Her real reason was that she wished to resume the conversation of the previous evening, which had left on her mind a sorrowful anxiety, and, as her husband's face now wore a calmer expression, she hoped that he would show less despair.

But when she was alone with him, she became suddenly timid and, not knowing what to say, scarcely dared to give utterance to what might be, after all, she told herself, the effect of her imagination weakened by her sickness. She remained with her hands crossed, and her eyes half-closed, thinking over again the arguments which she had been pon-

dering on since morning, and which now seemed to her dangerous or ungrounded.

There was complete silence, save for the noise of the waves that beat against the yacht: but even that troubled Alice so much that the beating of her heart almost prevented her from breathing.

She felt that her husband was bending over her, and suddenly, with the confidence and simplicity of a child, which made her so attractive, she murmured:

"Jean, help me," and she stretched out her hands to him with a gesture of one looking for support.

"My darling," returned the young man, throwing himself on his knees beside the couch: "pardon me the mischief I have done you; and fear nothing more. Yesterday you knew me better than I knew myself. For a few days I forgot all that I knew since childhood—honor, courage, religion, the very dignity of my name; and I have been, perhaps, the first Kerdren not to know how to suffer. But this madness is over; I vow it. And all that even your gentle voice was powerless to make me understand a few hours ago, I have just learned from a poor, modest missionary—faint, but with the eloquence of utmost simplicity."

He stopped for a moment, and then resumed so seriously, that a strange emotion made Alice's heart quiver.

"If my life henceforth is solitary, my best beloved," he added, "do not be afraid, and do not again think how I shall fill your loss. I shall neither go to Kerdren nor to sea; I shall go into a seminary, and, when I am a priest, I will pay special attention to the suffering of wounded hearts, and if at any time I can do one of them the good that has been done to me to-day, the weight of existence will seem less heavy for me to carry."

"A priest?" repeated Alice mechanically; "you a priest?" And she kept silent, looking with indescribable astonishment at the magnificent head bent toward her, and gazing into the eyes, so full of tenderness, that watched her. Her surprise was almost fright; so much so, that she thought her husband had lost his senses.

This sudden resolution was so out of keeping with Jean's

disposition; the life of which he spoke was just the opposite of all his previous instincts, habits and tastes, that the poor woman could scarce believe she heard aright.

"But what did this missionary say to you?" she asked a moment later, still doubting the evidence of her senses.

He repeated to her the missionary's words, describing with that eloquence which he ever found when touched, the impression produced in him by this humble old man.

The priest, whom Jean had been so lucky to find was, just as he had said, a simple man, capable of little eloquence, made timid from his long isolation from Europeans; but there was such conviction and such profound faith in his soul that he possessed in a great degree the art of making his fellow-men understand, without much difficulty, the duties and obligations in life, so that it was impossible not to be struck by him.

Like the curé of Ars, who swayed his audience merely by saying: "My children, love one another; love one another, I beseech you;" putting so much paternal tenderness into his simple words, the missionary had profoundly reminded Jean of the law of human suffering, its inevitable allotment to every one, and its grandeur, when the end of it all is borne in view; and he would have made any one accept sorrow. And then, when to all this was added the unconscious preaching of the good old man's life, he who had been away for years from civilized life, frequently subjected to malicious treatment, amenable at all times to rude privation, and who pursued his task with so much meekness, one felt so belittled beside him that it was impossible to ask of him the pity which he freely bestowed on every one in suffering, and that, too, with a nobility and warmth of heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

As soon as Jean had introduced the missionary to his wife, she began to understand better the unexpected revelation he had made her. She also felt specially impressed by the worthy priest whose simplicity was so closely allied to greatness, and this impression explained to her all the better the sudden change in her husband's thoughts. So, besides the calmness which this resolution gave her, she, unselfish though she was, felt a certain relief at the thought of a life which would be exclusively devoted to her; it would console her in a measure for the separation from him she so ardently loved. She was the first to begin to speak to him about it when he came down, yet, try as she would, the tears trickled down her cheeks, as she spoke of the future which would be so far removed from her.

"My love," asked Jean gently, "is there anything you dislike about the project."

"Great heavens," she cried, "cannot you read the utter selfishness of my thought?" Then, lowering her voice to a whisper, she said, "Nothing can be sweeter to me, more utterly, selfishly sweet, as I am absolutely obliged to leave you. And, after all, what on earth can be nearer the dead than priests? . . . When you pray, it will seem to me that some of your thoughts will be for me; and, if at last, you should be consoled—"

"Oh, do not talk like that," he said, suddenly interrupting her; "we were speaking of accepting life, that was all."

"Can you imagine," she said after a pause, "what my most ardent desire now is? I long to embroider for you the first stole which you will wear. If I could only have time to do it. What do you think, Jean?"

This was more than the poor fellow could bear, and he

held his head between his hands until he had regained strength to speak.

When he returned to Alice's room, the floor was strewn with a quantity of goods which made a heap near her couch; whilst between her hands she held the white silk which she looked at in all ways. At nearly every stop made by the "Kerdren," Jean had bought her bric-à-brac, jewels or silken materials, which he thought were rare; and she had taken some of them out of her cupboards. Choosing a plain, white silk, she had had her maid cut a stole out of it, and now she was beginning to embroider it with large flowers. It seemed as though her will gave her back all the strength of former days, and she drew her needle in and out with a motion that was almost agile.

"Come," she said to her husband, when the Breton maid had gone out; "do you like it?"

He looked at it to please her, and then turned away his head, feeling as though his courage was about to fail him.

"It will make me so happy to think you will have it," she added in a whisper.

From another piece of goods—a kind of flowered silver cloth—she had had great lilies cut, and these she appliquéd, arranging them and grouping them with that taste which was so natural to her, fastening down the edges with silk, and finishing off everything with a slight silver thread. From that day on, Alice did not allow herself a moment of rest. She got up earlier and earlier every morning, and had herself carried on deck immediately, and all that was necessary for her work was brought to her. She spoke quietly, and not bitterly, and it seemed as though the sorrow of the separation was lessened by this souvenir, which she was leaving as a tie between herself and Jean.

Very rarely did she talk of her fast-approaching death, and one might have imagined she had once again grown blind to the truth, though it was far from being so, in reality.

While she worked, she would often raise her heavenly eyes to her husband, smiling at him in her adorable way, looking at the sea which she loved more and more every day and then again take her needle in hand.

Yves had learned the nature of her work, and in great

surprise he watched the return of her strength, due to the power of her will, and employed upon such an object. As for Jean, he was absolutely seized with a superstitious terror. He asked himself if the last flower would be the sign of the end; and this work, which Alice longed to finish, inspired him with horror, and spoke to him so vividly of a time when she would be no longer near him.

Thus the terrible drama unfolded itself on board the vessel, floating, as it were, between heaven and the ocean. The dearly-beloved young woman who was dying day by day before the eyes of her husband, courageous though she was, said things filled with such bitter regret, whilst beside her was this man solely occupied in following her every movement, asking himself every evening if the next day he would see her smile, and it made his heart turn icy cold. Between such infinite fluctuations the patient swayed continually, and her last days of life became something so striking and elevated that they could be compared to nothing on earth. These surroundings, comparable to none, this symbolical work which occupied the last hours of an existence already condemned, completed in the strangest way the young officer's life; and his special disposition was such that it would be impossible to imagine anything more calculated to show the full extent of his unhappiness than such surroundings. Alice seemed likely to have a peaceful death; the sharp pains and smotherings of early days had disappeared; and, when her husband offered to return to Brittany, she had merely answered:

"Oh, no; I beg of you. Things are so pleasant here."

Now and then, Jean, despite himself, allowed himself to be led away by the delusive hopes held out by this fictitious improvement, an improvement all the sadder for the doctor, who saw in it only the beginning of the end, and he could not help showing Alice what he felt.

She said, taking the stole, which never left her hands: "It can be used at the Thanksgiving Mass."

Wishing to see everything in the most hopeful light, Jean became vexed at what he thought made his wife look most sick, and said to her one evening:

"This black makes you pale," he said, pointing discon-

tentedly at the goods of her flowing robe. "When will you leave off mourning?"

"It is hardly a year yet," answered Alice mechanically, without either of them remarking how painful were both the question and answer. And then he whispered:

"I should have liked to have seen you out of mourning."

"That is very easy," she answered sweetly. "I do not think poor father will mind."

The next day, thanks to the activity of her maid, she was able to put on a light-colored flowing garment, whose peculiarities suited her delicious beauty marvellously well. It was a snow-white, filmy, wool goods, bought at Constantinople, intermixed with golden and silver flowers of exquisite delicacy. That selfsame day Alice worked the last lily on her stole, and she exhibited so much joy at her success that her voice rang beneath the awning with all the gaiety of olden days, though the sound was soft and veiled like a harp heard from afar.

As the stole was so nearly finished, she rested a little, putting off till the morrow the task of completing the edge; and—a fancy she had but rarely—she asked that dinner should be served on the bridge of the deck. The evening before the sea had been phosphorescent, and she had found such delight in gazing at the dazzling waves which the "Kerdren" flew through like a bird, in making thousands of sparks fly from them, that she hoped to see them once more, and was afraid that if she retired to her cabin before nightfall, she might not see them any more. The sun was scarlet and brilliant as she had seen it once before with her husband, as they sat behind the belfry of the monastery, whilst at the same time the moon rose. It was the end of February, and the short twilight of hot countries presents scarcely any interval between day and night. Her hand in Jean's, Alice looked round with ecstasy, and indicated with her finger the things she most admired. A light wind passed over the deck, the sun had entirely disappeared, and suddenly Alice began to shiver. Jean, who was looking at her, perceived it, and at the same time observed her become so very, very pale that he rose in fear.

"I am cold," she said, taking his hand. An expression of sadness passed over her face, and she whispered softly and very quietly:

"It is so sad, so sad!"

Then her eyes resumed their accustomed expression and, beckoning to the doctor who stood a few steps away speaking to Yves in a significant tone, she said:

"Thanks, doctor," and held out her hand.

Then, as she turned towards the young midshipman, her agitation became greater, and she gasped with emotion:

"The waters of France—shall we be in the waters of France? I long to see them."

He answered her affirmatively naming Tunis, and kissing the little hand which she held out to him, he turned aside to leave her alone with her husband, warning, by a word, the sailors who stopped their ordinary avocations to watch this cruel scene with a pious respect.

The moon lit up the sea, the murmur of the waves formed an accompaniment to Alice's dying words of tenderness, and the phrases of regret which escaped her now and then filled Jean with a heart-stirring sweetness. He was kneeling near her, and, bending beneath the weight of an indescribable sorrow, could only reply:

"My best-beloved, my best-beloved."

With a last effort she bent towards him, and, drawing to her the stole which had remained on his knees, she said:

"Remember."

Then she gave one short, quick gasp, and all was over.

Jean returned to France by way of Nice, recalling his first meeting with his wife in that city to which he was now bringing back her coffin. The awning beneath which Alice had lain so long, had been made into a mortuary chapel; while the sailors, arrayed in their very best, watched on deck round Madame de Kerdren. The flag, floating at half-mast, was veiled in crape, while the silver ornaments of the coffin were completely concealed beneath the mass of flowers.

It was early morning when the yacht anchored in the port, and the hearse was almost the only vehicle visible on the quay.

And yet there was unusual animation everywhere; flowers were before all the houses; those earliest on foot seemed to have a certain holiday air. In the court-yards stood crowds of workers who were trimming carriages with flowers, while the cries of the flower-venders were heard everywhere.

Neither Jean nor his cousin had remembered that they had arrived in the Carnival season, and that, by a sad coincidence, the corpse had been brought back to Nice the day of the "Battle of Flowers," a little more than a year after the evening she had met Jean at Madame de Semiane's.

Though the final preparations were hastened as much as possible nine o'clock struck when Madame de Kerdren's coffin, carried by twelve sailors, was landed from the boat on the quay.

The flowers had not yet been put on the black velvet pall, and just when the bearers arrived at the hearse, two young, fashionable and lively women, who were passing, stopped respectfully.

"How sad it is to bury one's dead on the day of the Carnival," murmured one of them.

And quickly, with an involuntary movement, without seeing the two officers in dress uniform who stood by, the fair speaker advanced and deposited upon the coffin the huge bunch of lilac which filled her arms, and then she made the sign of the cross. Her companion laid by its side the mass of violets which she held; then, suddenly startled, ready to excuse themselves, they turned back as they noticed the young men. Never did they forget the grave and touching bow of the two young officers and the expression of Jean's eyes while he looked on at the sympathetic pity extended to the memory of his wife.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

When the Count de Kerdren was ordained, a full half of Saint Sulpice was filled with his friends and comrades; and Jean was, on this occasion, the object of general sympathy. Yves, faithful to his word, had staid with his cousin as much as possible, in view of his changed life; and all those who were cognizant of the story of his broken heart, felt their eyes grow full of tears as they saw the white stole of the young priest, entwined with its silver lilies; and, above all, as they observed the last one of the flowers, the one which was unfinished.

Kerdren is closed up, and as mute as a tomb. The sailors of the yacht tell round the fireside every night the story of the sad months of their cruise; and the peasants who listen to them cry as they recall their mistress.

Jean has never been able to make up his mind to return to the castle; but as he wished to give a good master to those worthy people, he had decided long ago that he would put the estate in the marriage basket of his cousin Yves. The whole collection of jewels is still there, except the betrothal ring. Jean would not allow it to be taken from Alice's hand.

"She will be the last lady of Kerdren," he said, "and it is but fitting that she should bear it away."

The Ablé de Kerdren was sent to the parish of Saint Germain of the Fields. He had demanded it as a special favor, and one can easily understand why, when it is remembered how close by the cemetery of Mount Parnasse is to this church.

The young priest's sorrow is no longer what it was in the early days, when his terrified cousin thought he was on the point of becoming mad; but the wound is forever bleeding

at the bottom of his heart; and, one summer evening, he was seen to stop as he passed through the Rue de Vaugirard; he was seen weeping as he halted at the gate of the Luxembourg. In front of him was an open window, and within the house a fresh young voice sang Schubert's "Adieu" with so much purity and feeling that every note of the melody reached him, evoking recollections of the past.



JO SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 129 093 1

